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The Revolt of the Masses

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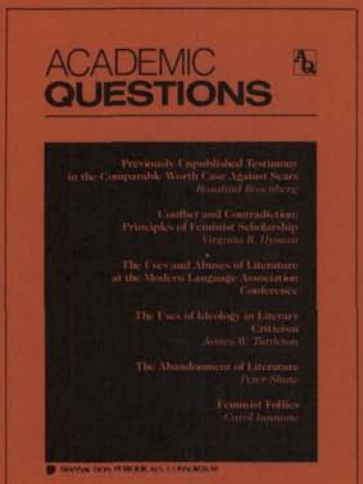
ACADEMIC
QUESTIONS
Previously Unpublished Testimony in the Comparable Worth Case Against Sears
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1988
VOLUME LV NUMBER 3

CONTENTS

CONTRIBUTORS

ARTICLES

Raymond Aron	*The Revolt of the Masses*	359
David Lehman	*On the Publishing Front*	371
Eugene Goodheart	*Desire and Its Discontents*	387
Robert Julian	*Heidegger and Hitler*	429
George Jochnowitz	*Marx and Islam*	437
Jed Perl	*Transatlantic Relations*	445
Dominique Schnapper	*Letter from Paris*	460
Raymond Carney	*Crane and Eakins*	464

FICTION

Sergei Dovlatov	*Aunt Mara*	404
Daniel Moyano	*Unspoken Words*	409

ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS

David Twersky	*Palestinian Tactics, Palestinian Goals*	450
Abraham Shumsky	*Media Tactics*	457

NEW POETRY FROM ENGLAND, IRELAND, AND SCOTLAND 474

Blake Morrison, Michael Longley, Medbh McGuckian, Charles Tomlinson, Anne Stevenson, John Sims, Alison Fell, C.H. Sisson, Douglas Oliver

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THE STATE OF POETRY

Sven Birkerts	*Selected Poems* by Tony Harrison *War Music: An Account of Books 16–19 of Homer's Illiad* by Christopher Logue *Selected Poems 1968–1986* by Paul Muldoon	**484**
Michael Collier	*The Sunset Maker* by Donald Justice *Foreseeable Futures* by William Matthews *The Lotus Flowers* by Ellen Bryant Voigt	**490**
Stephen Cushman	*In Time and Place* by John Hollander	**493**
Paul Debreczeny	*Beyond the Limit: Poems* by Irina Ratushinskaya, translated by Frances Padorr Brent and Carol J. Avins	**497**
John Drexel	*The Haw Lantern* by Seamus Heaney	**500**
Donald Hall	*Selected Poems, 1957–1987* by W. D. Snodgrass	**505**
David M. Halperin	*Archaic Figure* by Amy Clampitt *The End of Beauty* by Jorie Graham *The Tradition* by A. F. Moritz	**508**
W. S. Merwin	*Poems of Love and War. From the Eight Anthologies and the Ten Long Poems of Classical Tamil* Selected and translated by A. K. Ramanujan	**514**

LETTERS **520**

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Partisan Review

Lionel Abel, Hannah Arendt, Raymond Aron, John Ashbery, W.H. Auden, James Baldwin, Donald Barthelme, Roland Barthes, Samuel Beckett, Daniel Bell, Saul Bellow, Peter Berger, Isaiah Berlin, Harold Brodkey, Peter Brooks, Robert Brustein, Albert Camus, Cyril Connolly, Morris Dickstein, T.S. Eliot, Michel Foucault, Helen Frankenthaler, William Gass, Allen Ginsberg, Nathan Glazer, Eugene Goodheart, Clement Greenberg, Peter Handke, Elizabeth Hardwick, John Hollander, Sidney Hook, Richard Howard, Irving Howe, Franz Kafka, Frank Kermode, Arthur Koestler, Leszek Kolakowski, Irving Kristol, Milan Kundera, Edith Kurzweil, Doris Lessing, Mario Vargas Llosa, Robert Lowell, Dwight Macdonald, Norman Mailer, Bernard Malamud, André Malraux, Steven Marcus, Mary McCarthy, James Merrill, Leonard Michaels, Hans Morgenthau, Robert Motherwell, Vladimir Nabokov, Joyce Carol Oates, George Orwell, Amos Oz, Cynthia Ozick, Octavio Paz, William Phillips, Marge Piercy, Norman Podhoretz, Barbara Rose, Harold Rosenberg, Philip Roth, Jean-Paul Sartre, Meyer Schapiro, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Roger Shattuck, Ignazio Silone, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Andrei Siniavski, Susan Sontag, Stephen Spender, William Stafford, William Styron, Lester Thurow, Michel Tournier, Diana Trilling, Lionel Trilling, Robert Penn Warren, Leon Wieseltier

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Raymond Aron

THE REVOLT OF THE MASSES

I should confess my uneasiness at commenting on the ideas of the master of Spanish thought in our century, Ortega y Gasset. Why conceal my nervousness or, better yet, my troubled conscience? I have no position that entitles me to this task. Ortega y Gasset was obviously known in France, but I must admit with shame that he seemed to share the destiny of Benedetto Croce. The latter dominated Italian culture for more than half a century, but his works are only partly translated into French, and his influence has not gone beyond limited areas, mostly of the Italianists. It is the same with Ortega y Gasset. Two of his major works, *Ideas and Beliefs* and *The Revolt of the Masses,* have been translated, but these hardly represent the range of his ideas, let alone the nucleus of his philosophy. A few good French works have been dedicated to Ortega, but they failed to place him in the circle of foreign philosophers whom our philosophers consider fit, though not necessary, to discuss. Accepting the opportunity to address the Institute in honor of this great man, whom I met only once, I wanted to make a personal, if not a collective, act of contrition.

I vividly remember *The Revolt of the Masses,* which I read for the first time in a German translation half a century ago, in 1931 or 1932, coinciding with the rise of Hitler. At this tragic moment in European history, speculation on the masses and the elites belonged to the zeitgeist; if my memory serves me correctly, men of opposing political opinions referred to Ortega's thesis. Was it necessary to consider Hitler a member of the elite who reestablished the sense of obedience in the masses? Or, on the contrary, was he *par excellence,* himself, a man of the masses, primitive, violent, separated from the culture? Those who understand Ortega do not hesitate to respond to such a question, although Hitler's is a unique case that probably escapes all classification.

Editor's Note: This essay, translated and reprinted with permission from *Commentaire* (Number 40/Winter 1987-88), was first presented as an address given at the Ortega y Gasset Institute in Madrid on May 6, 1983.

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I shall compare Ortega's theory to those of other historians or philosophers who use the same concepts of masses and elites. I also shall venture to generalize from the collection of essays the philosophical inspiration of his work as a whole.

The Masses and Elite

Whoever reads through *The Revolt of the Masses* remembers above all the characterization of the masses or, more important, mass man. What is his definition? He is the average man, mediocre. He is also a man emptied of his own history, without the entrails of the past, who, as a result, remains outside all disciplines. He lacks a "within," an inexorable intimacy, an inalienable self, an irrevocable "I." He is always disposable, in order to pretend that he is this or that. He has only appetites, he presumes only his rights, and he does not believe in obligations. He is the man without nobility, who obliges—*sine nobilitate*—the snob.

How does the elite man distinguish himself? The latter, it seems to me, has a goal, gives himself without thinking to a task, instead of letting himself live. The elite man submits himself to obligations he himself has created. But a natural objection arises: have there not always been more mass men than elite? This question implies the choice, by nature or society, of a small group. Ortega would accept this objection. For his thesis is not about two types of men, but about the revolt by one of these types, by mass man who imposes his will, his mediocrity, on the entire society. Briefly, the revolt of the masses can be called the resignation of the elite.

A superficial reader easily would arrive at the unpleasant conclusion that Ortega is restating, in a different vocabulary, the opposition between the people and the upper classes. The philosopher refuses the sociological implication of his thesis. Elite men exist in all classes of society, even if the upper classes inevitably have the advantage. And in passing, he detects numerous mass men among intellectuals, among the learned, the specialists confined to narrow activities—often more scientific than technical. Max Weber spoke of some "specialists without spirit," an idea that Ortega would not have rejected.

Elite man and mass man oppose each other because one has an inside and the other does not; they also oppose each other because one keeps, within himself, the entrails of history, and the other has broken with his past. A cultured man has an historical conscience, without which he has no access to historical reason, reason different in nature from that of mathematical science and physics. The reason

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at work in these natural sciences, whose success transforms the environment and the resources of humanity, seizes on partial aspects and on abstractions of reality. It owes both its marvels and its limitations to the method it employs, to the analytical truth that it establishes. Another method of reasoning is necessary to understand the human world in perpetual evolution, the concrete history in which the elite man must act.

The Revolt of the Masses

It is the revolt of the masses that distinguishes our era—a revolution more a result of the decline of the elite than the intention of mass man himself. By turns, the philosopher sometimes insists on the greater number, sometimes on the abdication or the blindness of the smaller number. "The characteristic of the moment," he writes, "is that the mediocre soul, knowing its mediocrity, dares to affirm the rights of this mediocrity and often imposes them." But in another passage, he notes that the "distinguished society" is also in harmony with its time: "I have often thought about the memory of that charming young woman, the brightest star at the zodiac of Madridian elegance, who confided in me that she would not suffer through a ball to which fewer than eight hundred people had been invited. This proved to me to what extent the style of the masses, its tastes, triumphs today in all vital areas and imposes itself in the last vestiges of society which until recently seemed reserved for the *happy few.*" The taste for number, for the colossal is the visible sign of the domination by the masses.

Ortega's words would have aroused a French audience, or what is called the *"mouvements divers"* in parliamentary vocabulary. Isn't it almost indecent to underrate the people, the masses, and to demand that some conscious and worthy elites take on their mission? In fact, Ortega is a pessimist. Contrary to what many believe he thought, he does not cease to praise the rise of the historical level in our time, the cause of everything good and bad that the present and the immediate future hold.

The historical level relates in part to numbers. In the nineteenth century the European population more than doubled from 180 million in 1800 to 400 million in 1914. Thanks to the technical developments of the last century, amenities once reserved for a small minority became accessible to the majority. The masses have desires and needs that formerly qualified as refinements because they were the privileges of the few. The improvement of material life coincided with improvement in the judicial or moral one. The rights of man at

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first were only an idea of the minorities who discovered that every human being, through the mere fact of nature, and without any special qualifications, possesses certain fundamental political rights. All rights inherent in special gifts were condemned as privileged. But even in the nineteenth century, the masses who were enthusiastic about the idea of rights continued to live and feel, under democratic legislation, as they had under the old regime. The people did not feel that it was sovereign. It knows and feels this today. The feeling of sovereignty of the unqualified individual, of the individual as such, has become one of the fundamental psychological conditions of the average man.

Ortega ironically addresses himself to those who deplore the consequences of their own ideas: "The rationale of these rights was to take human souls from their interior servitude and to awaken in them a certain free conscience. Wasn't that what they wanted—that the average man would feel master of himself and of his life? That is already accomplished. So what have these liberals, these democrats, and progressives been complaining about during the last thirty years? Like children, they want the thing but not its consequences." On the positive side, however, the average man now has all the opportunities that once were reserved for the ruling minorities. On the negative side, mass man, the man without qualifications, imposes his will, his tastes, his mediocrity.

One can state without hesitation that Ortega accepts the democratic revolution and knows of the increasing realization of the ideal of the rights of man, the principle of equality. He notes that the spiritual state of the average man, which existed in America since the eighteenth century, has become dominant in Europe. Not that the latter was Americanized, as is being said, not that there was, under American influence, a moral rapprochement of Europeans and Americans: "The triumph of the masses and the magnificent rise in the level of vitality came about in Europe for internal reasons, after two centuries of progressive mass education and the parallel economic enrichment." These lines were written in 1926, at a time when the seeming Americanization was not due to the influence of Americans.

A Liberal

Ortega mentions several times in his book that he is not engaged in politics. But, as you know, in France such a claim immediately is suspect. I have often quoted Alain's remark: "When I

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am asked if the split between the left and the right still has any meaning, the first thought that comes to mind is that the man asking this question is not of the left." To this, Ortega replies: "To be of the left or of the right is to choose one of the innumerable ways man manages to be an imbecile—both of them, in effect, are forms of moral hemiplegia." Had I remembered this formulation, I would have found a better answer to those who asked me whether I was on the right or the left.

But this book, which is not political—in the sense that it is not partisan—analyzes the situation in Europe more than half a century ago in a way that is still relevant today. It illustrates the validity of "historical reason."

The latter, it seems, resists the radical separation of facts and values. Historical understanding, in other words, contains a reason in itself. Ortega is antirevolutionary; in fact, he deplores revolutionism. I cannot resist quoting him since I have developed similar ideas, though not as well: "Demagogy is a form of intellectual degeneracy, a great phenomenon of European history, that appeared in France around 1750. Why at that moment? Why in France? It is one of the nerve centers in the destiny of the West and particularly in French destiny. It is a fact that since then, France, and by irradiation, almost the entire continent, believed that revolution would resolve all the great problems of humanity. That is why France now is in such a difficult condition: this country possesses, or thinks it possesses, a revolutionary tradition. It is true that in France there was a great revolution and several sinister or laughable ones. These revolutions served primarily to engender life in France for an entire century—except for a few days or weeks—to more authoritarian and antirevolutionary political groups than in almost any country." And Ortega adds that the twenty years of the Second Empire—the great moral pit of French history—are due to "the superficiality and lightheartedness of the revolutionaries of 1848." Tocqueville would have subscribed to this judgment.

To be an antirevolutionary is to be neither of the left nor the right, and that does not even imply that in every situation one is hostile to changing a detestable or anachronistic regime: it is to believe that the idea of revolution, and of transformation, as the foundation of a society is dangerous, false, and refuted by European history during the last century. If Sartre is so often mistaken when he writes on politics, it is because he never cured himself of revolutionism.

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This mental or moral affliction is the result of a misunderstanding of the imperative wishes of "historical reason": continuity and change. Ortega, who detests the revolutionaries, remains faithful to liberalism. He respects and admires the French "*doctrinaires,*" so neglected and misunderstood in their own country. He states unhesitatingly: "It is possible that the future belongs to the intellectual tendencies similar to theirs . . . different from the lympathic rationalism of the encyclopedists, and the revolutionaries who find absolutes in some false abstractions, the *doctrinaires* who discover that history is the real absolute. History is man's reality. There is no other. It is through history that man has come to be the way he is. Negation of the past is absurd and illusory, because the past is the nature of man returning at a gallop . . . . " Man differs from animals because he does not forget his past, because each generation does not start afresh. Man's treasure is his past.

As to political institutions, Ortega clearly states his preference: parliamentary democracy or, if you like, representative institutions. He doesn't deny the eventual necessity to reform these institutions but he defends them, justifying them in the light of historical reason. Who are the enemies of representative institutions? First of all, they are those who refuse discussion and do not believe they and their actions must be held accountable. "Under certain types of syndicalism and fascism in Europe, for the first time there surfaced a type of man who neither wants to give a reason nor to have one, but who simply is determined to impose his opinions."

Ortega's antifascism is in and of itself. A civilized philosopher—allow me a few words that might pass as redundancy, but there were in our century renowned philosophers who thought politically like barbarians—therefore wants to reduce force to ultimate reasons. "Direct action" consists of reversing the order and proclaiming violence as the primary rationale and even as the only reason. Writing before the rise of Nazism, Ortega sees in the French syndicalist revolutionaries, in *"L'Action Francaise,"* pioneers of this barbarism.

Between the domination of the masses and the taste for "direct action," the philosopher sees a specific relationship. "When direct intervention by the masses in public life has become normal, accidental and less frequent than it was, 'direct action' appears as an official norm."

The justification of liberal democracy does not come from intellectual poverty or from the brutality of those who oppose it: "The

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political form that has witnessed the highest regard from the community is liberal democracy. It takes the resolution to reason with others to the extreme; it is the prototype of 'indirect action.'" And again, "Liberalism is the supreme generosity; it is the right that the majority grants to the minorities; it is the most noble appeal on the planet. It supports its resolution to live in common with the enemy and, what is more, with a weak enemy." Ortega adds that the countries where opposition exists are fewer and fewer. Half a century later, this morose statement is still true.

At this point, a question arises: since Ortega did not base his ideas on abstract principles, outside of history, how can he base on history a liberalism that the masses tolerate less and less? If the masses mortally hate what they are not, how will coexistence with the enemy, and the respect of the adversary, survive the domination of the masses? The philosopher, it seems to me, does not guarantee the future: "historical reason" doesn't prophesy; it seizes the originality of situations, and it formulates the questions. It strives to distinguish between the royal voice and the impasses. The liberalism of the nineteenth century is not condemned or rejected in the dungeons of history through the rise of "social" conscience in the community. Representative institutions have not become anachronistic because the masses lay direct claim to sovereign power. Parliamentary democracy does not contradict the general proposition that all societies are aristocratic, insofar as they allow a minority to inspire or rule. Representative institutions depend on the political elite. The latter formulates the questions it poses to the people; it offers the choice between rival parties. The ballot determines the manner of choice, the model of decisive rule that often determines the success or failure of the regime itself.

A classical objection arises. Since history is the absolute, how could it dictate values, since one or the other bearers of opposing values find themselves in an "unyielding combat," as Max Weber said. "Does history itself permit discrimination between the gods at war?" If I understand Ortega correctly, his simplified answer would be: historical reason is not narration but interpretation and discrimination. Indirect action prevails over direct action because the latter implies violence and transgresses the rules elaborated through time, which have blended into civilization. To those who prefer violence to civilization, historical reason does not oppose a categorical imperative, positive or negative, but to those who consent to look, it reveals the vitality, the creation, the conviviality. Having discarded on-

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tology, religious dogma, and abstract principles, it is in lived reality that historical reason exercises its power of discrimination.

The European Question

Before comparing Ortega's philosophy of elites with those of some of his contemporaries, it seems necessary to summarize his analysis of Europe's place in the world. In effect, in the idea we are trying to grasp, the decline of Europe constitutes one of the major causes of the phenomena he observes and deplores. European culture seemed to him incarnated, at that time, by three national states, Great Britain, France, and Germany. Europe for centuries had ruled the world; it lost this capacity after World War I: "for the single reason that Europe, as has been said, is decadent, and as a result no longer bothers to command each nation, even the most miniscule come out of nowhere and make grand gestures." We are offered from all sides "a vibrating panorama of nationalisms."

With Europe demoralized, who is to take over as leader? Russia? "Russia needs centuries before being able to *aspire to rule.* It is because it still lacks control of itself that it needed to fake its adhesion to the European principle of Marx. It is still young, and this fiction is enough." As to America, it is even younger than Russia: "I have always maintained that it was a primitive people, camouflaged by the latest inventions. America has not yet suffered, and it is illusory to think that it could possess the necessary force to rule."

It is vain to speculate what Ortega would think of today's giants. In all probability, he would have modified his judgment of the role of Marxism in the Soviet Union. Its role is not what he would have recognized. Young or not, Russia gave itself to an ideology that did not forego the capacity of expansion, even though in Western Europe it seemed destined to an irresistible decline. Concerning the United States, on an important point he was wrong, at least in this book. (Perhaps later he would have expressed himself otherwise.) Ortega thought that the United States was too narrowly utilitarian to support the flame of science, disinterested, without Europe. And without scientific progress, he wrote, technique would also perish. But since World War II, the United States has had an eminent place in pure science. Altogether, the current military power of the Soviet Union and the United States would not necessarily have modified Ortega's fundamental diagnosis. Perhaps he would have added that the great powers, neither separately nor

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together, would rule, and that nationalisms, even the most minute, would assert themselves more than ever.

The major question of this book, older than half a century, concerns Europe. Of course, in 1924–1926 (when the book was written; the introduction to the French translation was written in 1937) the catastrophe of World War II had yet to take place. Germany, France, and England were the great powers, two of them metropolitan empires. These states were reduced, one to its island, the other to its hexagon, and the third to a territory split in half; let us add to them Italy and Spain, of inferior caliber, and the smaller, peripheral countries. Does Ortega's book still have something to say to Europe, to teach it?

What was he telling it in 1924? That Europe is a society that is homogenous in its plurality and that it must jealously preserve both; uniformity is the ruin of European civilization. Unconscious homogeneity drags each nation along in its provincialism. The nation, he adds, is born with the state. "Rarely, not to say never, does the state coincide with a primary identity of blood and language." The unity of language maintains political unity. The national state is by nature democratic; it incarnates, like representative institutions, a conquest of humanity through time. But it is never closed in itself, definitively sealed. The national state goes through three successive phases, the third of which includes the national states of Europe: "The state enjoys full consolidation. From this arises a new undertaking: to unite itself with the people who just yesterday were its enemies. The conviction grows that they share some affinities with us, in morals and interests, and that together we form the national circle opposing the more distant, more foreign groups. That is the new national idea that begins to ripen." As Ortega writes in his preface of 1937, here we have the unity of Europe and even the United States of Europe.

At this point, all the elements of his formula meet. The revolt of the masses is a result of the abdication of the elite. The masses no longer obey the elite in whom they no longer believe. And the elites no longer believe in themselves when they are without a goal. A nation needs a future as much as a past. What is the future of European nations who discover the inadequacy of their political structure to the demands of economic life? Their only future is a national European state: "The unity of Europe is not a fantasy. It is reality itself: and what is fantastic is precisely the other thesis—the belief that France, Germany, Italy, or Spain are substantive, independent

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realities." And Ortega quotes Montesquieu: "Europe is only a nation composed of several nations."

Ortega, Pareto, and Croce

I must now compare the ideas of Ortega to the theories of the elite that the sociologists of our century have developed. The philosopher from Madrid naturally uses a different vocabulary than the economic-sociologist from Lausanne, Pareto. Pareto also contrasts the elites and the masses, but he does not make a value judgment to define the rapport between the two. The elite is composed of those who have succeeded in their activities—the prostitutes as well as the recipients of the Nobel Prize. In fact, Pareto seriously considers only the leading political and economic class. He does not accord it any moral superiority related to its size, nor an explicit intellectual superiority, any more than Ortega considers the elite to be only those who commit themselves, who control their lives instead of submitting. Pareto would not have denied that the elite, in a descriptive sense, sociologically, counted mass men in their ranks, but, deciding to respect the rules of the "*logico-experimentale,*" he adhered to objective standards of social distinctions.

Most sociologists today, in differentiating between the masses and the elite, follow Pareto. Some speak of "strategic minorities," minorities who find themselves in key positions in the social realm, and as a result, exercise an influence disproportionate to their number. Others question even the existence of the elite. They do not deny that some are privileged, in prestige, in fortune, and in power. They deny, however, that these privileged constitute a *group*, aware of its unity, capable of acting in concert, as if obeying *one* wish, or having *one* objective. In any case, there is a wide gap between Ortega's style and that of contemporary sociology.

Croce always was hostile to sociology, even though in his sociology he participated in Marxist debates. I am unfamiliar with the texts in which Ortega expresses his feelings about sociology. He must have been suspicious of the quantification of social phenomena, but it seems to me that historical reason, in the manner in which Ortega conceives it, does not condemn nor necessarily neglect the teachings of empirical sociology which was created in Europe, expanded to the United States, and returned to Europe after World War II.

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Ortega never subscribed, it seems to me, to the radical historicism of Benedetto Croce, although there was an inspirational relationship between the two men. Both acknowledge that the reconstruction of the past inevitably refers to the historian's present. I do not know if Ortega, like Croce, would have called European evolution, "the history of liberty." Croce, without abandoning himself to progressivism, believed, more strongly than Ortega, in *the happy ending*.

Through their liberalism, they belonged to the same spiritual family. Both of them were interested in the French liberal "*doctrinaires*" of the beginning of the last century, in which the French themselves had no interest. Croce was, at the beginning of this century, closer to Marxism than Ortega ever was. But Croce, who in his youth had criticized Italian parliamentarism so harshly, toward the end of his life had a similar attitude to liberal democracy. However, their philosophical foundations differed profoundly. What leads us to bring them together is their encyclopedic culture, the immensity of their work, and the diversity of their books. There are no domains of humanity that were strange to them, or about which they did not write. They both placed themselves in the tradition of German philosophy. I feel comforted in thinking that Ortega did not scorn journalism. He wrote numerous articles, long and short.

Do Croce's and Ortega's style of philosophy belong to the past? Of course, this style needs men capable of practicing it (Croces or Ortegas do not arise by command). But the question I would like to ask myself (in conclusion) addresses both method and content. *The Revolt of the Masses* belongs to what is called *Kulturkritik*. This genre has not disappeared with the development of sociology. Herbert Marcuse's book *One-dimensional Man* also addresses value judgments, ways of living and thinking. A comparison can illustrate the permanence of certain themes of *Kulturkritik*. For Ortega the mass men are like spoiled children; they enjoy material and even moral advantages once reserved for a small minority but they want everything immediately; what is given to some must be for all. Inventions spread to the masses and awaken everyone's desires. Marcuse, weighed down by his Freudian and Hegelian vocabulary, presents people in advanced industrial society as alienated, victims of the media, hungry for goods, because the producers arouse the desire to consume, without which the economic machine would cease to function. Ortega states that men of rich societies have become spoiled

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children who want to obtain everything without understanding the causes of their opulence, without submitting themselves to moral standards. This moral analysis is in contrast to the trend in Freudo-Marxist analysis: that it is the regime that creates the men it needs.

Between these two methods or vocabularies, I would not hesitate, under other circumstances, to state my preferences. I shall content myself to state here that Ortega and Marcuse resemble one another in that they *judge* the condition of men in their society. Marcuse is one of the sociologists of our time who does not hesitate to announce his moral stance even though he analyzes it. He belongs to the Frankfort School that does not submit to the Weberian imperative of the rigorous separation between *analysis of facts* and *judgment of values*.

I hope that the legitimate and fertile development of scientific sociology will leave room for the moralists of "historical reason," like Ortega and Croce. They are valuable elements of European life, being acutely aware of the "artificial" character, the "relativity" of each culture; they do not fail to judge, to distinguish between what nourishes civilization and what produces barbarism, to distinguish between an "elite" that submits to the demands of the "masses," and an "elite" that knows what the "masses" want without having to question them. They incarnate the "self-criticism" which doubtlessly remains the richest source of European vitality. That is why, despite and because of the anxieties he formulates, Ortega's book, which I have briefly presented, encourages me to plead even more vigorously the cause of a Europe which considers itself decadent.

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David Lehman

ON THE PUBLISHING FRONT

When Hollywood needed a profession for its latest Frankenstein, the image merchants made her a New York City book editor.

Alex, the spurned lover played by Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction,* is a family-wrecking, malevolent madwoman, than whom hell hath no greater fury. She behaves like a real book editor for all of ten seconds in the movie, but that's beside the point. She's simply supposed to look the part, to project a plausible profile, to embody a mystique about the publishing world. Hey, look her over: a liberated and lusty single woman in a downtown New York City loft, who works flexible hours, has a disregard for convention, a masculine first name, and a bohemian sense of glamour. If she is also capable of unleashing vast amounts of moral anarchy into the model suburban family, as Alex does in *Fatal Attraction,* that, too, makes perfect metaphoric sense. It taps into the deep American suspicion of books, and of the literary life, and of the fatally subversive attractions of New York City.

Of one thing the filmmakers could be certain: audiences will overlook the fact that Alex is never shown working on a manuscript, conferring with an author, lunching with an agent, negotiating a contract, approving jacket copy, estimating sales figures or calculating the size of an advance. But, then, few people outside the trade have a clear picture of what an editor does—or know very much about how publishing works.

In truth, the book business is a mystery even to highly educated people, including the very authors and dungaree-clad university professors who depend on a free press. By most standards, it's an unusual industry, and its actual workings are almost as fascinating as any myth of its seductive and subversive powers. It is, in the best of times, a high-risk, low-margin enterprise. Begin with this oddity: The most glamorous, most visible, and arguably most vital aspect of any publishing program—the publication of adult trade hardcover books—is the least consistently profitable; textbooks, professional and scientific publications, children's books ("juveniles") and reference books (such as travel guides, tax guides, dictionaries, and cookbooks) are the industry's reliable money-makers, but they're not where the cultural glory is.

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Few other industries see their wares subjected to such careful critical scrutiny, much of it sophisticated, nearly all of it public. For that matter, few other industries operate under so severe a commercial handicap. When a trade publisher supplies a store with books, it does so not only at a discount but on a consignment basis—the bookseller can return the books if they don't sell. (Because of returns, the late Alfred A. Knopf once quipped, books can be "gone today, here tomorrow.") Exact figures are hard to come by because, as one publisher cannily acknowledges, "We lie, as everyone does, about returns." But figure that even a hugely successful book may have returns of forty percent, and you've got a good idea of what the marketplace odds against you are like.

The returns policy underscores the escalation of risk in the era of "the blockbuster complex," as Thomas Whiteside dubbed it in a much-discussed series of articles in *The New Yorker* eight years ago. When a big book bombs—a book bought for big bucks and printed in huge quantities—the returns can devastate the publisher. At stake is more than your cash flow, more than your credibility with the increasingly influential book chains, who are your major customers. At stake is your high-priced author's primary asset, his track record, not to mention your own financial solvency. You can't afford to fail several times running when the stakes reach the $5 million level, as they did last year when the firm of William Morrow and its mass-market affiliate Avon bought the combined hardcover-paperback rights to James Clavell's *Whirlwind.*

How has *Whirlwind* done? The results are not yet all in, but the people in the balcony have been holding their noses ever since the curtain went up on this four-pound turkey. From the time a 200-page teaser made the rounds of publishers' offices, word of mouth had it that the 1,100-page tome stank. Reviews ridiculed the book, which didn't help (though reviews are largely irrelevant among a blockbuster's intended audience). True, *Whirlwind* wound up on top of the best-seller list—but only briefly, skeptics say, and only because a veritable blizzard of the books hit the stores all at once. The inventory, as they say in the chain bookstore business, turned slowly. And since the publishers kept rather than sold the paperback rights, they have to count on a two-million copy paperback sale—and the dream of a future movie tie-in—to redeem the book that broke the bank at Monte Carlo.

Lawrence Hughes, head of the Hearst Trade Group, which encompasses Morrow and Avon, blames the hype generated by the

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record-setting advance for the industry-wide perception that *Whirlwind* flopped miserably. "It would have had to have been an atomic explosion to live up to people's expectations," Hughes says. "In the cold hard world of book publishing, the book made money for its publisher. It just wasn't the super bonanza it was meant to be." The hardcover edition has sold "in the neighborhood of 600,000 copies," which sounds like an awful lot of copies—until you recall the size of the advance and the million-copy expectations it aroused. "It's too bad that so much emphasis is placed on the author's advance and not on the authors themselves," Hughes adds, though he concedes that the *Whirlwind* auction did nothing to diminish that trend.

The trend goes back to the sky-high paperback auctions of the late 1970s, when the ante kept getting raised on glitzy page-turners hawked by super-aggressive agents. Ever since then, there's been a headline-happy, show-biz aspect to the formerly tweedy-seeming book business. Bidding battles have made trade publishing seem a sexy species of Wall Street speculation. Sexy but dangerous, because the market can crash on an overpriced property. The publication of David Stockman's *The Triumph of Politics,* for example, involved a grave miscalculation. Put it this way: Stockman's inside view of the first Reagan Administration came out about a year after people seemed to lose all interest in the subject. To advance $2.4 million on the book, as Harper & Row did, meant that somebody over there had banked on selling nearly a million copies. That's quite a gamble.

What happens if you miss your bet—as, by all accounts, Harper & Row did on *The Triumph of Politics?* That depends; some disasters hurt much worse than others. I like the rule of thumb proposed to me by a self-effacing editor at a major house (not Harper & Row): "Nobody's ever happy about a book failing, but you're not terminally unhappy if you think the book's spectacularly good. Those are the breaks. The terrible thing is when a book fails and you never gave a shit about it in the first place but you did it because you smelled money." Perhaps somebody at Harper & Row thought Stockman's book was spectacularly good. It's possible.

Is trade publishing growing ever more dependent on such megabooks? Yes and no. A healthy number of any season's best-sellers were acquired with modest expectations. On the other hand, the major houses can't afford to stop chasing hot properties. It's a function, as publishing people like to say, of the "economies of scale": the bigger you are, the higher your overhead, the more best-sellers you need every year just to break even. "The competition for the big

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authors is driving up the prices enormously," cautions Robert Bernstein, the courtly red-haired human rights activist who is Random House's president and chairman of the board. "It is an almost impossible game to win." That hasn't prevented Random House's own flagship imprint from playing the game with fierce aggressiveness in the last three years; its list of expensive recent acquisitions includes a new John Jakes novel (for well over $4 million) and Barbara Taylor Bradford's next three gushers. In the blockbuster sweepstakes, Random House is seen to be competing head to head with Morrow, Putnam, Bantam, Viking-Penguin, and—above all—its traditional rival, Simon & Schuster. "You're going to see only a few big players, because only a few can afford to play," Bernstein predicts. "It's a very dangerous business."

The paradox is that big-budget books are supposed to eliminate risk, not create it. According to the theory of "brand-name publishing," a James Michener, a Danielle Steele, or a Stephen King is money in the bank at whatever the price, because the mass reading public—people who get intimidated at old-fashioned downtown bookstores but feel right at home in a Walden or a B. Dalton—want in a book what a hamburger-consumer wants when he wanders over to the twin yellow arches of a McDonald's: utter reliability, no surprises. Hence you get, as a rule, a lot of book for the buck when you buy futures in a Michener. In effect, the publisher of a big ticket item is paying for the author's established track record—and wagering that he or she will continue to please a loyal following and attract new readers. Generally the theory works well, says Richard Snyder, the hard-nosed head of Simon & Schuster's $1.2 billion publishing empire: "It's almost the safest investment you can have in trade publishing."

It is possible that, misled by the headlines, we have overestimated both the commercial and the cultural significance of the blockbuster complex. It seems to be a common feeling among publishers—including those who have a hard time justifying the six-figure advances that agents are demanding and authors are getting—that an accumulation of unearned advances, rather than the failure of a ballyhooed big book, will be the iceberg that sinks any particular Titanic. (It's far easier to miscalculate on the future sales potential of a celebrated first novelist than on that of a veteran producer of potboilers.) As for the other main concern generated by the blockbuster complex—the fear that high-priced rubbish will drive quality lit out of the marketplace—let it be noted that the

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megabook mentality hasn't meant the end of literature as we know it. More than one editor keeps telling me, with real pride, that no book will die for the want of a publisher in the United States today. This is one of those propositions that's impossible to prove or disprove, but I guess I believe it.

To a certain extent, books in what's called, ambiguously, the "mid-list" range have benefitted from the axiom that one publisher's problem is another's opportunity. Probably no house did better last year than everyone's favorite maverick, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, with its commitment to high literary seriousness; the privately-owned firm copped its usual collection of critical kudos, literary awards, even a Nobel Prize, while hearing the cash register ring with unprecedented frequency as first Scott Turow's *Presumed Innocent* and then Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities* climbed to the top of the charts. Small presses and university presses have benefited, too, from the availability of good books that can't be mass-marketed. And then there are the elite, autonomous imprints that some publishing empires maintain as cultural luxuries—imprints like The Free Press at Macmillan, Basic Books at Harper & Row, Summit Books at Simon & Schuster, and most notably, Knopf at Random House. "There's plenty of room for niche publishers," is how Snyder puts it. "Any book of almost any talent, of almost any type, can find a publisher," adds Dan Green, the former Snyder associate who is now the CEO of Weidenfeld & Nicolson in New York. The new firm, which published its first book in September 1986, is designed to capitalize on the perception that "maybe the publisher won't be, and shouldn't be, one of the huge houses."

It's costing W & N a fair amount of money to prove its point. A friend of mine at a rival house shakes his head in astonishment over the substantial two-book advance—a rumored $275,000—that W & N used to snare David Leavitt from the Knopf fold. "At those prices Knopf was glad to let Leavitt go," my friend says. It may be that W & N has overestimated the young writer's commercial potential, his ability to earn back an advance of such a magnitude; it is also possible that the pressure of rising expectations will hurt Leavitt's writing. By contrast, my friend comes down much less hard on W & N's decision to shell out something on the order of $400,000 for Robert Stone's next novel. He points out that Stone, a consistently ambitious and compelling novelist, will be a boon for prestige whatever happens in the marketplace. But perhaps the underlying justification is the same for both the Stone and the Leavitt advances. Perhaps the

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strategy is to buy instant credibility at no matter what inflated price, which is something you can do only if you've got money to burn. Thanks to Ann Getty, money is one thing W & N has in good supply. The publishing industry has a long history of relying on angels with deep pockets, and the pockets don't get any deeper than Ann Getty's.

If people are expecting a lot from Weidenfeld & Nicolson—and from its Getty-owned cousin, Grove Press—it's because they're in a position to do us a lot of good. They are rarities, after all: medium-sized, privately-funded, independent-minded houses, receptive to books of cultural significance and literary sophistication. As it is, there are few enough trade publishers in New York that an agent can approach if what he or she has to hawk is a work of belles lettres, a collection of essays, a volume of poems. Consider poetry. Recent personnel changes hammer home the sense of a desperately constricting market. When in the space of a few months last year both Harry Ford and Elisabeth Sifton came to Knopf—from Atheneum and Viking, respectively—it meant that Knopf had gained two very talented, very experienced editors and consolidated its majority interest in American poetry; at a stroke, Knopf became the publisher of John Ashbery, James Merrill, Anthony Hecht, John Hollander, Philip Levine, Richard Howard, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. At the same time, however, this exodus of poets from Atheneum and Viking indicated quite clearly that both houses—historically among the most prestigious publishers of poetry—are now rather less than passionately committed to verse. (What's more, Knopf now has so many poets on its list that it may well declare a moratorium; if you weren't a Knopf poet on New Year's 1988, you can probably forget about it.) So while it's heartening to observe Knopf's affirmative interest, the effect of all these changes has got to be a net loss for poetry, and fewer outlets for it.

It's an odd feeling knowing that the art you practice is almost universally regarded as a lost cause. But that, of course, is really a statement about our culture and not about the New York publishing community.

* * *

Publishing requires making calculations in the dark: you must constantly try to determine how many copies of a book not yet written will sell at some future date under conditions that cannot now be predicted. The standard division of labor between an editor

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and a publisher doesn't strictly apply. Many editors aspire to the entrepreneurial ideal of the editor-publisher, who doesn't simply acquire and edit a book but gets involved with its promotion and public presentation. That means getting involved with figures, and lots of them. Thus, more and more editors find themselves feeding a string of numbers into a computer—"Let's see, size of advance minus straight sales, plus serial and book club rights, hold the paperback rights, since we might be keeping those, and forget about a foreign market for this book"—where each figure except the first is an unknown. At the same time, however, a good book editor can't afford to spend too much time on publisher's calculus. "I think if you looked too hard at the figures and the odds, you'd stop," says Ann Close, a gifted, soft-spoken editor at Knopf. "Each book you sign up is potentially successful. You have to think that way."

You have to think that way, though it flies in the face of another publishing truism: that in any given year, you may have a couple of titles that pay your whole rent and overhead. The marketing of books seems to work by the logic of a metonymy—that is, a part of any trade publisher's list is expected to sustain the whole, though you can't always tell in advance which particular titles will prove profitable. "Very few authors, percentage-wise, earn out their advances," a top publishing executive explains. "I mean, probably, ten to twenty percent earn them out. The other eighty percent are losing money for the publishing house. So it's the ten to twenty that's paying for the other eighty." The exact percentage will naturally vary from house to house and from season to season, but the principle is unvarying. Other than the film industry (whose source of stability is television, as textbooks and juveniles are a publisher's source of stability), it's hard to think of another business in which, in effect, one line of products regularly subsidizes all the rest.

In the end, however, what most distinguishes publishing from other industries is its singular mandate: to broker between culture and commerce. It isn't easy to serve both masters at once. Publishing is always getting faulted for behaving too much like a business—or not enough like one. "There are rules and regulations," in the words of Simon & Schuster's chairman, Richard Snyder. "You can't spend $190,000 on a book that's going to sell 2,000 copies, though we *would* if it would win the Nobel Prize and change the world. As a company, we have one responsibility: we have to take care of our employees and we have to perpetuate ourselves." The point's an important one. If you don't stay in business, how are you going to discharge your responsibilities to the culture?

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Still, in the capitals of commerce, a certain prestige will always adhere to the book trade, precisely because it doesn't deal in commodities whose marketplace value can be more easily gauged; it more nearly resembles a futures market in ideas and opinions, values and reputations. If part of the aim is to discover masterpieces and make them public, criteria more intangible and severe than best-seller charts are called for.

It is therefore always at least a little disconcerting to meet a marketing man who refers to books as *product*, just as it's dismaying to learn that in publishing jargon the term *literary novel* isn't a redundancy. The antonym of *literary novel* is *commercial novel*, as if to state a fact of publishing life that no serious writer or reader can want to hear—that there's frequently an inverse ratio between a book's literary quality and its commercial potential. Publishers will always cite exceptions, of course. They'll remind you that Umberto Eco's esoteric novel *The Name of the Rose* was a surprise best-seller back in 1983, that the even less likely Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* topped the charts last spring. Publishers usually *sound* optimistic, at least. You see, they say, there *is* an audience for serious books, even very difficult ones. Besides, they ask, why blame us for giving the reading public what it wants? "*Commercial* means that it sells, not that it's trash." Yes, and what does *literary* mean?

On the other hand—there's always that other hand when you talk about the publishing industry. For every efficient executive type who talks *product*, I'll show you five editors, book addicts all, who started at puny entry-level salaries and counted themselves lucky. You meet them everywhere, and not only at the *literary* imprints: tireless people, generous with their ardor, who would sooner challenge the reading public than cater to its lowest level. Asking such editors to describe what they do invites a profusion of metaphor. A measure of sweet idealism is present even when the speaker takes pains, a sentence or two later, to inject a gram of grim realism into the talk. Daphne Merkin (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich) likens one aspect of an editor's role to "crossing a bridge between a Columbia University graduate seminar and a commuter bus in New Jersey." Jonathan Galassi (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) favors the image of the double agent—meaning that the editor shuttles between author and publisher, whose sometimes conflicting interests he must try to serve, but implying too that the activity is clandestine and involves crossing frontiers with a sense of divided loyalties. Arthur Samuelson (Harper & Row) describes himself as "the sort of guy who, when he reads a book, walks down the halls to find somebody to talk to

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about it. But," he adds, "an editor is also a translator: an editor translates between an author's vision and a sales person's reality." Something beyond the profit motive is at stake.

* * *

Ask New York publishing people to cite the industry's most significant continuing trend, and half will point to "merger mania" or "consolidation" or some other buzzword for fewer bakers owning more of the pie. You pretty much need a flow chart to keep track of who controls what these days. Macmillan became the corporate master of Scribners and Atheneum in 1984. A year later, Simon & Schuster expanded its textbook division mightily by merging with Prentice-Hall. Business as usual: Morrow absorbed Arbor House in 1987, while Random House acquired Schocken. The big get bigger.

The one new wrinkle in the increasingly familiar takeover scenario is that foreign buyers have been making the loudest noises of late. West Germany's Von Holtzbrinck recently captured the trade division of what had been Holt, Rinehart & Winston. Penguin in London, which has owned Viking since the mid-seventies, added New American Library and Dutton to its holdings. Bertelsmann, the West German owners of Bantam, purchased Doubleday, ending that house's long history as a family-run concern and allowing Nelson Doubleday to give his undivided attention to the New York Mets. Literary agent Richard Curtis listed these and other recent changes of ownership in an amusing set of rhymed couplets:

> Thus in frenzied syncopation
> Proceeds the trade's consolidation.
> Scores of famous names of yore
> Have since succumbed to corporate war
> Or publish books with but a semblance
> Of their former independence...
>
> Is it possible we're heading
> Toward one great climactic wedding,
> When all but two remain unmerged,
> The rest absorbed, acquired or purged?

Curtis's poem ran in *Publishers Weekly*, the industry's trade journal, in its 1987 year-in-review issue. The poem's title: "Merger, He Wrote."

The takeover experience—or threat—can have dire commercial consequences. These are eat-or-be-eaten times, as Harcourt

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Brace Jovanovich found out in 1987. In May, HBJ employed complex financial maneuvers to fight off the attentions of suitor Robert Maxwell, a socialist British billionaire (two adjectives and a noun that Evelyn Waugh never managed to put together). The cost of resistance was high; the debt incurred to avoid the fate of becoming Maxwell House, so to speak, has forced a necessarily cost-conscious HBJ to adopt painful belt-tightening measures—and to bail out of its magazine unit for less cash than would have been raised if Black Monday hadn't happened last October 19th.

Just two months before rebuffing Maxwell, HBJ had itself tried unsuccessfully to acquire Harper & Row. That famous imprint went to a consortium headed by newspaper nabob Rupert Murdoch in conjunction with the British publisher William Collins PLC. Will there be major changes at Harper & Row? There are bound to be. Just consider that the new owners are already into it to the tune of $300 million; that's what an auction will do to a purchase offer.

There are reasons for the sudden influx of foreign capital, British and West German, into the New York publishing scene. The short-term *Economics 101* answer points to the weak American dollar and the safe American market, the new U.S. tax law (which made it advantageous for sellers to close on their deals sooner rather than later), and external circumstances (the cash-rich West Germans were prevented by strict antitrust laws from expanding at home). The long view is that the capital is flowing both ways, because the publishing industry has gone, or is on the verge of going, global.

"What you're seeing," says Simon & Schuster's Richard Snyder, "is the rationalizing of publishing in America." Being rational means, in this case, turning your sights on foreign markets. Snyder's firm recently set up a trade publishing division in London and is actively on the lookout for British companies to acquire; Random House, meanwhile, has pitched its tents in London by buying up Chatto & Windus, Jonathan Cape, and The Bodley Head. As Snyder sees it, "We've gone from a cottage industry to a professional publishing industry, and the next step is globalization. It's inexorable that it will come."

Roger Straus, Jr., the outspoken founder and CEO of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, is ideologically opposed to the conglomerate mind in publishing, but that doesn't make him any less shrewd in assessing what the process of globalization entails. Straus's assessment tallies neatly with Snyder's. According to Straus, the major New York publishers have, in effect, broken their own sound barrier in two stages.

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What Straus calls "Mach 1" was achieved when one major publisher after the other "decided that the way to own the whole apple was to own a mass paperback house as well as a trade house. The theory is simple: you buy the mass paperback rights to keep the book off the market from bidding by your competititors." Instead of selling the paperback rights to a successful book, a vertically integrated publishing house could do the book in both cloth and paperback. There would be additional risk, but it would be worth it; the house would be exercising greater control of the publishing process and reaping a greater profit.

The "publishing fraternity," in Straus's words, found this logic so compelling that a series of acquisitions and alliances became inevitable—with the effect that nearly every major New York house today is allied with a mass-market imprint. (Thus, Random House is allied with Fawcett, Simon & Schuster with Pocket Books, Morrow with Avon, Doubleday with Dell, Putnam with Berkley; the one obvious exception is Harper & Row.) This development prompted the complaint that the paperback tail was wagging the hardcover dog. And surely some of the pressure on publishers to concentrate unadventurously on proven performers and known quantities stems from their amalgamation with mass paperback imprints. Nevertheless, for a publisher determined to be a big player in New York, the reasoning behind vertical integration was more than persuasive—it seemed historically unavoidable.

What Straus calls "Mach 2" extends the logic overseas; it's the desire of the publishing giant to exercise a global reach—to control the world rights (or at least the world English-language rights) of its most lucrative properties. Again the theory is simple. The sale of foreign rights isn't really a source of profit, Random House's Robert Bernstein points out. So why not establish the means to publish the books abroad instead of granting a foreign publisher the right to do so? "Mach 2," as Simon & Schuster's Richard Snyder explains, already occurred—long ago—in the publication of scientific and professional books. Trade publishing is simply, finally, following suit: "Once you sell the rights, in effect you're really no longer the publisher, you're just a copyright holder," says Snyder. "You have no ability to determine how the book will look, how it will be presented, when it will be published, all the functions of publishing. I think that's unintelligent. And that's why I think you're seeing market forces being created that will adjust that. It's the last remaining piece of the puzzle, because all of our other publications are be-

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ing sold by ourselves. We believe our destiny should be within our own hands."

The commercial rationale for globalization would seem to be irrefutable, the proof being that the process is everywhere in evidence. It makes sense: there's no reason a well-managed publishing company can't publish books of every kind, in every format, in every available market. Certainly the trend is unmistakable. Readers of the business section on February 16, 1988 are aware that Pearson, the British conglomerate in which Rupert Murdoch has a sizable stake, has just bought venerable U.S. textbook publisher Addison-Wesley. Please note that Pearson owns Penguin with all *its* holdings—and that Murdoch owns Harper & Row in addition to his 20.6% share of Pearson. And you thought his mind was occupied exclusively with saving *The New York Post.*

* * *

Because of the centrality of books in our culture—a centrality that has thus far survived the computer and the VCR—there is often a sense of nervous urgency when publishing people ponder the industry's future. That is another peculiarity of the book business: it is often to be seen taking stock of itself, amid rumors of disaster ("I hear that sixty-seven people got fired in the service department of Harper & Row") and spectacular strokes of good fortune ("Iacocca! Cosby! Trump! It's like minting money!"), at fancy midtown and up-and-coming Union Square restaurants, where lunch is celebrated as much as consumed.

One question that recently got asked a lot is, how will the industry do in the wake of the stock market crash of last October 19th? Opinion seems divided between the venison eaters who are frankly uneasy and the people having cold poached salmon who hold that, for all its risks, the book business is recession-resistant. The argument the latter make is that the need for textbooks is constant and that in times of national travail the demand for inexpensive forms of home entertainment—books, cassettes—goes up, not down. It certainly sounded good over dessert.

Many gossipy lunchtime conversations effortlessly perpetuate publishing's sense of itself as "the new Hollywood." The phrase, as publisher Joni Evans uses it, refers to a process that has gone on ever since "the *People* Magazine society came in": the transformation of authors into telegenic celebrities, who prosper to the extent that they look and sound glamorous on morning television shows. Authors

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have become stars—they've done almost as much for talk shows as talk shows have done for them. The apparatus of quick fame and the possibilities of mass-merchandising have combined to lend book publishing that show-biz aura, that Hollywood glow. This isn't an altogether happy development, especially if you think the written word's place is on the page, not on the *Today* show. Nevertheless, it's a fact of glitz; an appearance on *Donahue* will sell lots more copies of a book than a rave review in an influential magazine.

The ebullient Ms. Evans herself made headlines this year as the pivotal figure in a publishing industry script that Hollywood couldn't have bettered. It came as the latest twist in publishing's relatively mild-mannered version of the cola wars. Until recently, Ms. Evans ran the trade division at Simon & Schuster, where her husband— Mr. Snyder—happened to be her boss. Perhaps her departure from the S&S family was inevitable from the time the couple divorced. Still, it was rather stunning of Ms. Evans to defect for a top spot at Random House, Simon & Schuster's traditional adversary. Beyond the irresistible operatic effects, it was, in a way, like Macy's going to Gimbel's—or like Coke imitating Pepsi. It'll be interesting to read the next chapter in the long and often acrimonious rivalry between the two publishing giants, but that's another story.

Other lunchtime conversations center on the perennial favorite, *whither publishing?* There are several ways these state-of-the-industry appraisals can go. One is the ever-popular "decline of the West" approach. An extreme form invokes a Golden Age, which is usually supposed to have occurred around the time that the speaker got started in publishing. There is something as suspect with this theory as with its polar opposite, the hyperbolic "better-than-ever" point of view ("Take a look at the numbers! There are more readers than ever!"). Editors who gnash their teeth at the system protest too much. If the ship is really sinking, you wonder what's keeping them from manning the lifeboats.

Ted Solotaroff, an editor at Harper & Row, issued the strongest recent indictment of the book business, a jeremiad that *The New Republic* ran last spring under the witty headline "The Literary-Industrial Complex." Twenty years ago, when Solotaroff went to work at New American Library, "publishing was still largely a genteel profession," he writes. Publishing used to mean "taking sensible risks in the pursuit of what was interesting." Now it means "the promiscuous pursuit of best-sellers." Corporate ownership of publishing houses is blamed, as are bookstore chains and "the new breed of

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American book consumers," for putting the squeeze on "literary and intellectual publishing" while shamelessly courting "the new mass market of the age of consumerism and the culture of narcissism." These are the big words that make us so unhappy.

There is something to be said in favor of "the decline of the West" point of view, though it tends to sentimentalize the past. There has been, inarguably, a proliferation of what the eminent editor Robert Giroux calls "*ooks*" (meaning "publications that are almost but not quite books"). It's undeniable, too, that conglomerate takeovers of formerly independent presses have kept the industry in a state of jitters. It's tempting to depict the conglomerates as the Goliaths of publishing, and it's hard to root for a Goliath.

But the trouble with the picture drawn by Solotaroff is that it oversimplifies a very complex actuality. If offers a one-size-fits-all scenario—the philistine money men invade; the venerable publishing house loses its soul; the aim is megabucks off megabooks from here on out; *the business is going to the dogs!* Not only does the script fail to acknowledge the significant differences in character and quality among the various publishing giants, it denies the ever-present possibility of innovation—the possibility that entrepreneurial editors will contrive new ways of yoking culture and commerce to their mutual benefit. It also exaggerates the evil of things as they are. For all their alleged greed, the major New York houses routinely publish an awful lot of books that nobody expected to get rich on but somebody believed in.

Then there's this business about publishing having once (and quite recently) been "a genteel profession." Does that mean that people were decent to each other or that publishing was a game only the rich could play? In short, was book publishing ever really any better than it is today? As Simon & Schuster editor Robert Asahina suggests, a look at the best-seller lists from 1935 to the present is chastening: "You'll find the same proportion of dreck to quality books, then as now." The reading public always could break an editor's heart. We may be a nation of readers, but what we read, in great numbers, are magazines and newspapers, not books. Robert Giroux recalls learning this lesson in 1940 when fortune handed him, then a novice editor at Harcourt, Brace, the manuscript of Edmund Wilson's *To the Finland Station*. "I thought 'this book is a masterpiece.' We published it. It sold about four thousand copies. I was astounded." Some Golden Age.

That brings me to my favorite theory of publishing, the

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"nothing new under the sun" point of view and its subtler variant, "Things are more like they are now than they ever were." (The quotation is from President Eisenhower, though he was talking about something else.) In publishing terms, the argument goes this way: there's more of everything—more money, more books, more hype, more glitz—but the substance of publishing hasn't changed. "Sure, some people are saying that the business is going to the dogs. But there were always people who said it was going to the dogs!" Case in point: back in 1954, Bernard De Voto declared in *Harper's Magazine* that "tripe always has been the basis of the publishing business." De Voto was directing his ire at paperback publisher Kurt Enoch of New American Library, the very imprint that Ted Solotaroff nostalgicizes in "The Literary-Industrial Complex."

Erwin Glikes, who runs The Free Press, is an eloquent proponent of the "everything has changed but nothing's really different" school of thought. "All forms of publishing, from newpapers to books, have a vested interest in claiming that the world this morning is utterly new and that the only way you'll ever understand it is to buy me—for thirty cents or for $19.95," says Glikes. "Inherent in that is an enormous cultural lie. Why do we understand Rabelais or Shakespeare or Moliere? Not because the world has changed but because the world has not changed at all except superficially. The critical things about book publishing—the quality of the work, the handsomeness of the design, the effort that goes into distribution, finding good authors, treating them well, and placating the owners—are the same whether the owner is a corporation with far-flung interests or a rather self-indulgent multi-millionaire."

Much of the change we think we see in publishing is really just one fashion or another going in or out of favor. Genuine innovations happen only once in a while, though they do happen. Someone manages to figure out a new, possibly cost-effective way to connect a serious book with its intended audience, and the idea catches on, and pretty soon everyone's doing it. Yet even these innovations often boil down to cosmetic changes in style and packaging.

Take, for instance, the much-publicized revival of the so-called "trade" paperback (the kind sold in bookstores, rather than drugstores). Some of the best younger editors in New York—John Glusman at Macmillan and Deborah Futter at Bantam, to name two—are committed to the idea that the trade paperback might be the medium of choice for certain novels and short-story collections. The concept of the *trade paperback original*, which involves bypassing

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the hardcover stage of publication, isn't entirely new. Yet it seemed daring enough when editor Gary Fisketjon launched Vintage Contemporaries four years ago. The series went against the accepted orthodoxy, which held that reviews sell books and paperbacks don't get reviewed. But Fisketjon's rationale was persuasive. In paperback, he reasoned, you could publish three times as many copies as you could afford to do in cloth and charge one third the retail price; a uniform jacket design with variable elements would establish the idea of a series—with the benefit that one successful title would give instant credibility to the others; and if the design itself were sufficiently striking, bold, and deliberately nonelegant, you might just score with the post-Vietnam generation of readers.

Vintage Contemporaries worked, thanks largely to the extraordinary box-office success of Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City,* which Fisketjon chose to kick off his series. The book set the "yuppieback" trend in motion. Implicit in that neutral-seeming but pejorative-sounding term is a degree of critical ambivalence, but no one denies that a new option in publishing fiction has opened. In addition to Vintage Contemporaries, we now have Bantam New Fiction and Collier Fiction and Atlantic Monthly Press's Fiction Series—and a publishing climate as friendly to younger novelists as any we've had in years.

As innovations go, the trade paperback original is mild, not radical, the extension of an old idea to fit changing circumstances. And that, in a nutshell, is one way of saying what good publishing sometimes seems to be about: a surface-change, a change in style, to help solve the most enduring and constant of publishing problems—how to get a worthwhile book into the right reader's hands.

To paraphrase a Gertrude Stein remark about Ernest Hemingway, book publishing looks modern but smells of the museums. For an industry that appears to be in constant flux and perennial crisis, the key words are *constant* and *perennial.* Publishing has changed very little at its core. "It is not a business which is enormously innovative," says Sonny Mehta, Knopf's new editor-in-chief, who pioneered the trade paperback original in Britain nine years ago. "At its heart, you get a manuscript, you work on it, it gets designed, you look at it, you select a binding case, you go through a whole series of procedures that remain kind of constant. At the heart of the whole publishing process, that *is* it, isn't it?"

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Eugene Goodheart

DESIRE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

In recent years there has been an explosion of talk about desire that has challenged the values of rationalist discourse, in particular the rationalist model of the self. Coherence, unity, wholeness, the value terms of that discourse have become suspect terms of repression. The ordering impulse of reason has come to be seen as a reactionary effort to contain dangerous vital energies, threatening particular political, social, and economic interests that reason masks in the guise of objectivity and impartiality. For instance, some versions of feminist criticism associate "reason" with patriarchal domination and assert the claim of female desire.

Certain philosophers in the past have argued that the dominance of reason is an illusion. Hume characterizes reason as the slave of desire, and Nietzsche challenges the idea of reason as an autonomous entity, contending instead that reason is no more than "the state of the relations between different passions and desires . . . every passion contains in itself its own quantum of reason." What distinguishes the view of what I call the contemporary ideologues of desire is not simply its realism about the power of desire, but its *unambivalent* valuing of that power. The effect of "liberating" desire from its subordinate place is to see it as autonomous and uncensored. What does uncensored desire look like? As we might suspect, it is the opposite of the rationalist view in which reason subordinates desire in the interests of unity and coherence. The "self" as an expression of uncensored desire is in fact hardly a self at all: it is rather "fragmented," "inchoate," "discontinuous." These are the words of Leo Bersani, whose literary criticism has been "an experiment" in unbinding, so to speak, the imaginations of poets and novelists—or in some cases, in representing the unbinding process by which the fragmented, the inchoate, the discontinuous is liberated in works of imagination.

The seeds of the contemporary revolution of desire are to be found in writers of the 1950s, Herbert Marcuse (in *Eros and Civilization,* 1955) and Norman O. Brown (in *Life Against Death,* 1959). In the fifties, psychoanalysis, a revolutionary force in the decades of the twenties and the thirties, had achieved an immense conservative authority, indeed had become a way of life, a kind of secular religion

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for the educated middle class in the urban centers of America. Psychoanalysis was no longer simply an idea; it became a clinical practice with all the institutional prestige of a medical science. No longer the revolutionary of the twenties, Freud came to be regarded as a master, the authority in a tradition that bears his name, comparable to Marx vis-à-vis Marxism or the church fathers vis-à-vis medieval Christianity. Disputes were resolved by appeal to the "sacred" Freudian text—or to a particular understanding of the text. Simply put, the psychoanalytic orthodoxy had resolved the apparently insurmountable dualisms in Freud's thought: consciousness versus unconsciousness, ego versus id, reality versus pleasure, in favor of the repressive term in each of the dualisms. The reality principle (and its cognate terms: ego, consciousness) had been elevated to the supreme place in the psychoanalytic hierarchy. The healthy psyche was now obliged to postpone its gratifications and accommodate itself to social reality. Orthodox theory and practice in effect dissolved Freud's ambivalent and equivocal view of the Manichaean struggles within self and civilization.

Against this psychoanalytic orthodoxy, Marcuse and Brown asserted the claims of desire, pleasure, unconsciousness—indeed, of all the repressed terms in the Freudian oppositions. Marcuse openly reacted against the Enlightenment legacy in the psychoanalytic tradition. "Self-consciousness and reason, which have conquered and shaped the historical world, have done so in the image of repression, internal and external. They have worked as the agents of domination; the liberties they have brought (and these are considerable) grew in the soil of enslavement and have retained the mark of their birth." Marcuse shared with his orthodox antagonists an enormous respect for Freud's achievement: he too believed that Freud was the central figure of modern culture. But his development was not exclusively within the Freudian tradition. He came to Freud as a member of the Frankfort school, formed in the traditions of Hegel and Marx. And as one might expect, he was primarily concerned with the political and social implications of Freudian psychological categories.

It should be remarked apropos of Marcuse's critique of Enlightenment reason that his identification of reason with repression is based on an extraordinary misconstruing of the Freudian concept of repression. As Freud stated with special emphasis in his 1915 essay, "Repression," "*The essence of repression lies simply in the function of rejecting and keeping something out of consciousness.*" It need hardly be said that the

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essence of self-consciousness and reason is to bring something into consciousness. Indeed, the insidiousness of repression is precisely its unconscious character. I say unconscious rather than irrational because repression has its reasons, for instance, the reduction of pain that might be the inadvertent consequence of the satisfaction of an instinct. But the "reason" of repression is "correlated" (Freud's word) with the unconscious and not to be confused with rational consciousness. Conscious rational reflection is not only not repressive, it may be a path of psychic liberation. Marcuse's idea of repression has its source not in Freud, but in politics, where, of course, repression is more often than not conscious.

Marcuse's aim (it is Brown's as well) is to establish the possibility of a nonrepressive civilization. This idea, it would seem, is a contradiction in the Freudian view—in which civilization is by definition repressive. How then is such a possibility imaginable? How can civilization become the direct expression of erotic energy, a field of self-delighting aesthetic play, if the repressive character of civilization is a fundamental premise of Freudian thought? Marcuse in effect accepts Freud's account of the repressive character of civilization, but he historicizes it; that is, he sees it as a function of a specific historical organization of society, not as intrinsic to it. Marcuse characterizes the principle behind this function as the "*performance principle:* the prevailing historical form of the *reality principle.*" The historicizing of civilization Marcuse believes to be an implication of Freud's own work, though it is concealed by the concept of the reality principle, which makes "historical contingencies into biological necessities." Marcuse even endorses Freud's view that "a repressive organization of the instincts underlies *all* historical forms of the reality principle in civilization," but he notes Freud's historical insight "that civilization has progressed as organized *domination.*" If the historical dimension were lacking, it would be futile to advocate, as Freud does in *Civilization and Its Discontents,* a mitigation of the severity of repression.

Marcuse never relinquishes the category of repression. Indeed, he makes a crucial distinction between surplus and basic repression—that is to say, between restrictions necessitated by social domination and the "'modifications' of the instincts necessary for the perpetuation of the human race in civilization." Nonrepressive civilization is something of an exaggeration in Marcuse's argument. The essential claim is that repression engendered by "social domination" is not a necessity of civilization. The raison d'être of social domina-

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tion, Marcuse argues in Marxist fashion, relates to an economy of scarcity characterized by an acute competition for the objects of desire. Social domination is also a function of the early phase of industrialism when the economy is being transformed into one of abundance. What occurs is a paradox (a Weberian rather than Marxian insight) in which the productive conditions of industrial civilization require the repression of desires multiplied and fostered by industrial revolution. The expansive sense of desire and power is given to us, for instance, in this passage from Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South:*

> [Margaret Hale] liked the exultation in the sense of power which these Milton men [industrialists of the north] had. It might be rather rampant in its display, and savour of boasting; but still they seemed to defy the old limits of possibility, in a kind of fine intoxication, caused by the recollection of what had been achieved, and what yet should be. If in her cooler moments she might not approve of their spirit in all things, still there was much to admire in their forgetfulness of themselves and the present, in their anticipated triumphs over all inanimate matter at some future time which none of them should live to see.

In practice, of course, the working conditions of factory life require the regulating of this "fine intoxication." Marcuse writes at a moment when, it would seem, the economy of abundance has outgrown its repressive origins and surplus repression is no longer an historical necessity. He envisages a democratic society of material abundance which reduces necessary labor to a minimum and frees the person to live a life of creative leisure. Such a life has been historically possible for a small privileged class: Marcuse wants to make it available to everyone. The possibility of leisure, however, is not enough. What is required now is a transformation of psychic life in which work becomes play, an erotically charged nonutilitarian activity.

In distinguishing between repression that enforces social domination and "repression" required for survival, Marcuse opens up the possibility of lifting taboos against so-called perversion. Heterosexual genital sexuality need not be the only permissible sexuality. In fact, it is, in the Marcusan view, gratuitously repressive of the full range of sexuality, which is by "nature" polymorphously perverse and not exclusively genital. Perversions may threaten social or patriarchal domination but not survival. It is important to note that

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Marcuse's advocacy of the polymorphously perverse is not in the interest of a liberal tolerance for the variety of sexual expression. Polymorphous perversity is an expression of the happiness of *all,* the *promesse de bonheur.*

The mythical origin of repression, that is, of social domination, according to Freud, is to be found in the crime of the sons against the father, the crime of parricide described in *Totem and Taboo.* The inevitable consequence of the crime is psychological guilt and the political and social enforcement of paternal authority. The effect of Marcuse's extrapolation of the Freudian argument is an attack on patriarchal domination. This argument sanctions feminism without being explicitly feminist.

It is, of course, one thing to establish the theoretical possibility of a nonrepressive civilization and of a nonrepressed self, but it is another thing to create such a civilization and self. The Marxian possibility is not available to Marcuse. The proletariat, the agent of Marxian revolution against oppression and exploitation, cannot be expected to be an instrument of *erotic* liberation. The psychological repression described by Freud and Marcuse is endemic to the whole society; it is not confined to a specific class. What is therefore required is a psychic force to overthrow internal repression.

Marcuse's solution is aesthetic, the playful eroticizing of consciousness already anticipated in Schiller's *Letters on an Aesthetic Education.* In Schiller, "the stress is on the impulsive, instinctual character of the aesthetic function." Marcuse also finds support in the aesthetics of Kant and Hegel. "The truth of art is the liberation of sensuousness through its reconciliation with reason: this is the central notion of classical idealistic aesthetics." Marcuse quotes Hegel:

> . . . thought is materialized, and matter is not extraneously determined by thought but is itself free in so far as the natural, sensuous, affectional possess their measure, purpose and harmony in themselves. While perception and feeling are raised to the universality of the spirit, thought not only renounces its hostility against nature but enjoys itself in nature. Feeling, joy, and pleasure are sanctioned and justified so that nature and freedom, sensuousness and reason, find in their unity their right and their gratification.

To speak of the solution as aesthetic does not tell us how the unrepressed self will be created. But leaving aside the pragmatic

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question, a number of other questions arise. How accurate are Marcuse and Schiller in representing the aesthetic? What of the disciplinary and repressive side of aesthetic consciousness that we find in Gustave Aschenbach (in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*), for example? And how desirable is such a solution? The fully realized artist or artist type (Marcuse is envisaging a society of artists) is an aristocratic character, whose triumphant emergence in the world would coercively eliminate ordinary men and ordinary life. Rilke's formulation is memorable:

> Not for all time will the artist live side by side with ordinary men. As soon as the artist—the more flexible and deeper type among them—becomes rich and virile, as soon as he *lives* what now he merely *dreams*, man will degenerate and gradually die out. The artist is eternity protruding into time.

Despite Marcuse's vision of a utopia of play, his view of nonrepressive civilization is remote from anarchy. Unlike Leo Bersani, a romantic anarchist who conceives of desire as fragmentary, scattered, disordered, the very antithesis of reason, Marcuse imagines desire as a simulacrum of the reason it renounces. "Civilization begins when the primary objective—namely, integral satisfaction of needs—is effectively renounced." In imagining an *integral* satisfaction, Marcuse is doing little more than appropriating the totalizing habit of Hegelian thought, producing, so to speak, a rationalism of desire that has the features of its adversary.

The extraordinary affinities between Marcuse and Norman O. Brown, whose book *Life Against Death* appeared only four years after *Eros and Civilization*, confirm the operation of the zeitgeist, the sense that a new psychological tyranny had been created by the very discipline that stood for psychological liberation and that any new liberation would have to occur within the categories of the discipline, that is, by valuing the repressed terms in the Freudian dualisms. The gesture is a familiar one. Reformations are not created *ex nihilo;* they receive their authority from an interpretation of the very texts on which the established authority bases itself.

Like Marcuse, Brown radicalizes Freud's insights. Where Freud speaks of all human beings as more or less neurotic or as more or less diseased, Brown characterizes man in Nietzschean fashion as a disease. And the disease is to be found in the repression of the true "essence" of man, desire. " . . . the essence of man consists not, as

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Descartes maintained, in thinking, but in desiring." To speak of desire as an essence, as Brown does, is, of course, paradoxical, because essence belongs to an antithetic rationalist discourse. The radicalizing of insight and language is so strong that a slippage occurs, for instance, in the chapter "Neuroses and History," from neuroses to madness. According to Brown the so-called normal (neurotic) condition of man is insane. Modern literature has provided graphic instances of this condition in the characters of the underground man in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* and of Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,* among others. Kurtz may be the most compelling instance, for his madness is perceived as a direct result of his having raised reason, his own reason, to the position of divinity. In carrying on the Nietzschean legacy, Brown anticipates the poststructuralist attack on man, on a humanism that has to be surpassed.

Like Marcuse, he turns to art as an antirepressive force which encourages polymorphous perversity, regression to infantile eroticism, etcetera. Again as in the case with Marcuse, one may wonder about the accuracy or adequacy of Brown's representation of art, which stresses (one might say overstresses) its child-like aspect at the expense of the philosophic mind, and affirms Dionysus at the expense of Apollo with a rather vague concession that the murderous risks of the Dionysian must be obviated by a reconstruction of the Dionysian ego:

> The work of constructing a Dionysian ego is immense, but there are signs that it is already underway. If we can discern the Dionysian witches' brew in the upheavals of modern history—in the sexology of de Sade and the politics of Hitler—we can also discern in the romantic reaction the entry of Dionysus into consciousness. . . . The only alternative to the witches' brew is psychoanalytical consciousness, which is not the Apollonian scholasticism of orthodox psychoanalysis, but consciousness embracing and affirming instinctual reality—Dionysian consciousness.

The distinctive feature in Brown's argument is his affinity for mystical and religious thought. Here, as we might expect, he is sharply critical of Freud's hostility to religion. Freud viewed religion, as he viewed art, as institutional neuroses, not as an instrument of liberation. Though critical of what he understands as D. H. Law-

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rence's puritan attitude toward sexuality in insisting as Lawrence does on the spiritual conditions of sexuality (he calls him "a paradoxically conservative philosopher of sexuality"), Brown shares with Lawrence an appreciation of religious intuitions of the sensual mysteries. The final chapter of *Life Against Death* is titled "The Resurrection of the Body," imagined under the auspices of Dionysus rather than Christ.

The effect of Marcuse's and Brown's performances is to illicitly dialecticize Freud (in the Hegelian manner) by introducing a third synthetic term, where there is none in Freud. Freud remained throughout his career a dualist, a dramatist of irreconcilable conflict in which death was the only resolution.

Both Marcuse and Brown wrote in the fifties before the explosions of the sixties and, in particular, 1968, when an international student revolt occurred in which erotic and passional liberation was at the top of the revolutionary agenda. The locus of revolutionary activity became the university rather than the factory, its agents students rather than workers, and its grievances psychic and moral rather than economic and moral. In France, Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1968) provided, so to speak, a theoretical representation of the revolutionary explosion. The idiom of the book is a potpourri of Marx, Freud (in its Lacanian formulation), Saussurian linguistics, structuralism, etcetera. The book is part analysis and part manifesto, at once brilliant and exasperating. The enemy is capitalism in its familial form, the Oedipal structure, seen as the chief agent of repression.

There is an irony in the fact that Michel Foucault wrote a preface to *Anti-Oedipus,* for if the work of Deleuze and Guattari represents a culminating expression of the revolution of desire, Foucault's *History of Sexuality,* composed in several volumes a decade later, represents the most powerful "reaction" that we have against it. But before I turn to Foucault, I want to look briefly at one of the most significant and intelligent responses to the intellectual and imaginative ethos of 1968, Lionel Trilling's *Sincerity and Authenticity,* originally the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard University in 1969–70. The lectures were delivered at the very moment when student confrontations were taking place at Harvard. Though Trilling does not explicitly refer to the events of the year, they are sufficiently present in the work of writers whom Trilling addresses: Sartre, Marcuse, Brown, and R. D. Laing.

In the final and most important chapter, "The Authentic Un-

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conscious," Trilling begins somewhat deviously with a question about the loss of authority that narrative has suffered in the contemporary period. His real objective is to account for psychoanalysis's recent failure to command credence. According to Trilling, the failure lies with the fact that psychoanalysis depends upon narrative, and narrative has come to be seen as a fictional construction that betrays the authenticity of unconscious life. Trilling's exposition of the connection between psychoanalysis and narrative is cryptic and unsatisfying, but it does serve to introduce the theme of authenticity, which Trilling sees as the basis for the new revolutionary consciousness. Sartre is the crucial figure, having provided in the second chapter of *Being and Nothingness* the most powerful formulation of the theme. And his role is a curious one, because he opposes authenticity to the unconscious or at least to the psychoanalytic unconscious.

Sartre's objection to the psychoanalytic unconscious is twofold: ontological and moral. Ontologically, Sartre doubts its existence, because the id (Freud's version of the unconscious) can be known only by hypothesis; it cannot be directly observed. Morally, Sartre objects to Freud's division of the psychic whole into two, a condition that contributes to what Sartre considers the gravest of modern sins, bad faith. The division of the psyche enables the ego to displace responsibility to the id. Since the ego cannot control the id, it cannot be charged with responsibility for behavior which proceeds from the unconscious. Trilling quotes Sartre: "I *am* the ego, but I *am not* the id, which is to say, 'I am my own psychic phenomena insofar as I establish them in their conscious reality.'" Sartre believes in the theoretical possibility of a coherent, unitary self in which appearance and reality authentically coincide, though psychic division seems the condition of actual life. Trilling defends psychoanalysis against the charge of bad faith by pointing to its effort to overcome the dualism: "Wherever id was, there ego should be"; the ego must learn to assume responsibility for the id.

But Sartre's picture of the psychoanalytic self as a duality or as a series of dualities remains essentially accurate. His rejection of the duality from the side of consciousness is the obverse of the Marcusan or Brownian rejection from the side of unconsciousness. The desire for unified consciousness notwithstanding, psychoanalytic "authenticity" entails an irreducible duality of being.

The split subject means perpetual struggle—it means, among other things, that the self must negotiate a dual loyalty to itself and to civilization. Trilling's commitment to the psychoanalytic split sub-

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ject is the basis of his critique of the bad faith of so-called authentic being (whether under the sign of consciousness or of unconsciousness), which rejects the claims of civilization or society. For what is the consequence of standing completely outside of civilization (assuming that such a stance is possible), but madness?

> Yet the doctrine that madness is health, that madness is liberation and authenticity, receives a happy welcome from a consequential part of the educated public. And when we have given due weight to the likelihood that those who respond positively to the doctrine don't have it in mind to go mad, let alone insane—it is characteristic of the intellectual life of our culture that it fosters a form of assent which does not involve actual credence—we must yet take it to be significant of our circumstance that many among us find it gratifying to entertain the thought that alienation is to be overcome only by the completeness of alienation, and that alienation completed is not a deprivation or deficiency but a potency.

Trilling speaks of such an advocacy as cant, and he satirizes its claim to authenticity by inviting us to imagine what true and false means in this discourse. "The falsities of an alienated social reality are rejected in favor of an upward psychopathic mobility to the point of divinity. . . . "

And indeed, the argument for authentic unified being produces its own divisions, that is to say, contradictions. Trilling, for instance, acutely notes that Marcuse is not willing to give up on the idea of character, which depends on the traditional role of the family. Marcuse is distressed by "the devolution of the power of the superego," the result of the diminished authority of the family, which in turn results in a failure in individual development. Trilling wryly wonders whether "some Hegelian device will properly resolve the contradiction between Marcuse's predilection for the strongly defined character-structure that necessity entails and his polemical commitment to a Utopia which will do away with necessity."

One of the implicit objects of Trilling's critique is an early work of Foucault, *Madness and Civilization.* David Cooper, R. D. Laing's collaborator, cites with approval Foucault's characterization of madness as "the [true] voicing of the realization that I am (or you are) Christ." So it comes as something of a surprise to discover that in his last work, *The History of Sexuality,* Foucault offers us a critique of the

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revolution of desire from within, the product of a man who has lived and suffered the "liberation."

The History of Sexuality is the most original post-Freudian discussion of sexual desire we have. According to Foucault, the triumph of sexual desire occurred long ago, and the evidence for it can be found in the discourses that testify to its putative repression. He rejects the hypothesis of repression that has dominated our understanding of modern sexuality and which in his view constitutes an event rather than an explanation of the history of sexuality. The truth of our sexual experience, Foucault argues, does not lie in its repression but in its expression: that is to say, in the extraordinary variety of discourse about sex since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Analytical discourse "yield[s] multiple effects of displacement, intensification, reorientation and modification of desire itself." In other words, discourse is the Western version of *ars erotica,* multiplying new desires and new pleasures. In Foucault's conception, the displacements of discourse are not signs of repression, but stimulations of desire. What we are, do, feel, desire is not represented or repressed by language, but is in a sense created by it.

For Foucault all the agencies for regulating sexual activity are agencies of sexual expressiveness. He doesn't so much dismiss the fact of repression as change its meaning. He sees it as a major tactic in a pleasure-power game for sexual incitement. Foucault expresses in a strikingly unfamiliar way what may be the evident truth of erotic desire, that it is intensified under "repression." Foucault's "history" is a series of dense, cryptic suggestions about changes that in his view have taken place in the deployment of sexuality through the centuries—for instance, the change that took place between the deployment of sexuality by the church through the confession in which virtue and sin are the operative categories, and the medicalization of sexuality in which the sinful becomes the perverse and the pathological. In naming a sin, in compelling it to be confessed, in analyzing it, the energies of the sin (or the illness) are brought to light, developed, expanded, multiplied. In a sense, both the church and medicine invent the sins and diseases that they condemn. And those "sins" and "diseases" survive the condemnation. They are, as it were, secularized into the "natural" experiences of mankind.

Foucault's view of this history is as surprising as the history itself. Having challenged the repressive hypothesis on epistemological grounds, he goes on to see it as a concealment of the tyranny of

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sexuality in our lives. Indeed, all power tends to gravitate toward it. We have come to feel that sex alone gives intelligibility to the self, that it is the "hidden aspect and generative principle of meaning." The irony is that we self-delusively think of this tyranny as liberation. Foucault's reaction against the tyranny of sexuality can be read as movement toward asceticism or as a utopian envisaging of "a different economy of bodies and pleasures" in which sex has its place, but is no longer the essence, the "hidden" principle of man: Foucault has in effect elicited the essentialist character of the sexual revolution.

Desire is normally linked to indeterminacy, contradiction, chaos, inconsistency. It defies definition, it is existence in contradistinction to essence. This is the theme of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground:* "Desire is the manifestation of life—of all of life—and it encompasses everything from reason down to scratching oneself. And although, when we're guided by our desires life may often turn into a messy affair, it's still life and not a series of extractions of square roots." What I am arguing is that desire has come to function as an essentialist trope—which means that it has become controlling, coercive, a form of self-destructive tyranny. It is no longer simply the host of desires that make us living beings, but desire in its hegemonic version—as ruler of life. In his study *Erotisme,* Georges Batailles constantly stresses the essential extravagance of an unchecked desire that transgresses all limits and seeks an absolute fulfillment. The underground man might have written the following words: "Life is essentially extravagant, drawing on its forces and its reserves; unchecked it annihilates what it has created. . . . the thing we desire most ardently is the most likely to drag us into wild extravagance and to ruin us." Zuckerman, the novelist character in Philip Roth's recent novel *The Counterlife,* vividly captures the tyranny of desire: "the terrible unruliness spawned by unconstrainable desire—the plotting, the longing, the crazily impetuous act, the dreaming relentlessly of the other." The concentration of power in any single human energy or faculty, what we might call its ideological formulation of necessity, becomes a tyranny over other energies, if it doesn't completely repress them. The Foucauldian solution is to try to defuse or diffuse power. Of course, power cannot be absolutely destroyed. All mediations or particular expressions of human energies may grant power to one or more of them (reason, morality, freedom, sexuality). The diffusion of power is no more and no less than the provisionality and delimitation of each and every energy.

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The idea that desire may become tyrannical must seem anomalous to the many who would identify desire with freedom itself. After all, doesn't everyone dream of having one's desires satisfied? And isn't the thwarting of desire the very definition of unfreedom? The fact is that the profoundest students of desire (for example, Nietzsche and D. H. Lawrence) conceive of desire under the regime of necessity, not freedom. The interesting distinction is between strength and weakness, not between freedom and unfreedom.

Both Nietzsche and Lawrence have a predilection for men of power, and they oppose the thwarting of the full expression of power. But perhaps deeper than the advocacy of power is their respect for difference, that is, for the different powers and dispositions of power that characterize the human species. It is a desecration of life to impose an imperative (for instance, *be strong*) upon those who are incapable of strong action. The doctrine of strength does not justify coercion. The inner coercion of desire (whatever it might be) is perhaps unavoidable. We are subject to the necessities of our nature, but we are not necessarily subject (or should not be) to the necessity of someone else's nature—that is, a personal necessity transformed into a universal principle, a categorical imperative.

For Nietzsche, a principal source of tyranny is the platonic conviction that of the three sources of human motivation (reason, the will, and the appetites) reason should dominate. As Alexander Nehamas puts it, "Having identified a large number of independent motives and character traits, Nietzsche, in contrast to Plato, considers that the question which should govern the self requires a different answer in each particular case." The implication of this view is not confined to reason. If reason is not required in one case, it may indeed be required in another. And if desire is required in one case, it may not be required in another. Moreover, what does it mean for something to be required? Does it mean following out what is experienced as the necessity of one's nature, the overwhelming desire for a particular satisfaction, or does it mean achieving control or mastery of the desire as Nietzsche, for instance, envisaged the role of the artistic will? The considerations are complex and even confused, but it is clear that the possibility of tyranny is not confined to the discourse of reason. All discourses are potentially tyrannical.

The primacy of discourse in Foucault's argument (an assumption he shares with other poststructuralists) in effect contradicts the hypothesis of repression, for what is repressed according to the hypothesis are energies that cannot speak, that have no language.

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And in Foucault there is nothing but language and discourse. Foucault remains in a Cartesian tradition in which the *cogito* determines everything, a tradition that has no place for nondiscursive unconsious life.

One might demur from Foucault's view on the ground that there is a difference between, on the one hand, discourses of desire, and on the other hand, cultural reality in which desire in fact prevails or does not prevail. Such a distinction assumes that discourse and reality should not be made identical or at least that there is a reality beyond discourse. One might then argue in the spirit of the repressive hypothesis that in articulating desire on the conscious level one might be repressing it on the unconscious level; that indeed, discourse itself may be a repressive displacement of desire.

What is clear, however, is that the hypothesis of repression (as formulated by Freud and his followers) is not intended merely as a description of a psychological and cultural condition. It is a powerful expression of a polemic against repression and for desire. And it has had a substantial cultural effect. If it has not directly caused changes in family and social structures, the repressive hypothesis and the larger discourse of desire of which it is part have paralleled those changes.

We should qualify this characterization of Freud, if not of some of his followers. His "essentialism" may be more a matter of his legacy rather than of his actual achievement. His conception of the id is not reducible to a single term: it is divided between the sexual and the ego instincts. His view of the self is irreducibly ambivalent. The ego remains poised between the rival claims of the superego and id. If Freud did not intend to make the sexual motive the "hidden principle of meaning," he may have invited such a reading by having made sexuality the principal area of his explorations.

In criticizing Freudian (if not Freud's) essentialism, I do not mean, of course, to minimize the historic importance of Freud's discoveries. In insisting as he did on "the sexual etiology of the neuroses," Freud naturalized one of the fundamental energies of human life. And he could accomplish this task only by concentrating on the sexual factor. In his paper "Development and Regression," Freud insists that "psychoanalysis has never forgotten that there are instinctual forces as well which are not sexual. . . . It has simply been its fate to begin by concerning itself with the sexual instincts because the transference neuroses made them the most easily accessible to examination and because it was incumbent upon it to study what other people had neglected."

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Such exclusive concentration is necessary to any advance in knowledge. The argument for the variety and complexity of human life, when prematurely made against a newly evolving body of thought, can easily become a conservative, even reactionary obstacle to intellectual discovery. Freud could have made a similar claim for the centrality of the Oedipal drama in his evolving thought. But only a dogmatic Freudian could now claim that Freud's version of the Oedipus complex is a permanent, rather than an historically conditioned formation.

The recent empirical and theoretical work of the psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut is relevant in this connection. According to Steven Marcus's informed and lucid account, Kohut and his associates discovered that "the classical neurotic patient as first observed by Freud seemed to be gradually disappearing and was being steadily replaced by people who suffered from various kinds of what is known as ego-syntonic character pathology. In particular, as time passed, it began to be evident that a series of narcissistic disorders were presenting themselves as the emerging prototypical personality formation of the current era of our culture." The contemporary neurotic experiences feelings of emptiness or feelings of fragmentation and discontinuity. His narcissism is paradoxically based on a lack of "self-esteem." Kohut attributes the new neurotic type to the weakening of the Oedipal structure, that is, to the dissolution of family constraints, which manifest themselves in parental "commands, prohibitions, praise, scolding and punishment" and contribute to the development of the ego. "Children in the past were '*over*stimulated' by the 'threateningly close . . . emotional . . . life of their parents'"; now they are *under*stimulated by parents whom they experience as "threateningly distant." The absence of constraint and direction in the familial life is reproduced (or should the sequence be reversed?) in the wider social life in which permissiveness rather than restriction characterizes the prevailing ethos.

What I would like to suggest is a connection between Foucault's view of the history of sexuality and Kohut's discovery of a new neurotic type in contemporary society. The sense of emptiness and fragmentation that Kohut describes and that one finds in contemporary fiction—for instance, in the work of so-called minimalist writers like Donald Barthelme, Ann Beattie, and Raymond Carver—is connected with the discourse of uncensored desire. It can be understood as the result of what happens when desires are unbound, free to "imagine" their course irrespective of obstacles and resistances. They exhaust themselves, lose their energy and terminate in

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the experience of nullity. Ann Beattie's minimalist art is a particularly striking and yet representative case in its bleak tone and willlessness. The high hopes, the exhilarations of the sixties, have produced a kind of "hangover." What she gives us in her first novel, *The Chilly Scenes of Winter* (1976), is an artful style of desultoriness. The life of a character in Ann Beattie's fiction is represented through uneventful external details:

> Charles goes back to bed. He sees that Sam is already in bed in his room. He pulls the covers up over himself and falls asleep. He wakes up at five o'clock when the alarm goes off. He gets up, pushes in the button, and goes back to bed . . . .

Nothing happens, but the very fact that Beattie tells her story in the mode of realistic narrative in which events follow one another in a logical consecutive manner preserves a sense of expectation and even promise: something might happen. But it never does.

In associating Foucault with Kohut I am in effect altering Foucault's argument—or at least suggesting a different implication from the one that he seems to intend. Where Foucault speaks of the tyranny of sexual desire, Kohut implies its enervation. Is this a contradiction? I think not. It is precisely the elevation of sexual desire, indeed of desire as a supreme value, that entails as one of its consequences its enervation. What keeps desire alive is the sense of resistance, of the play of other values, energies, faculties. This is precisely the force of Foucault's linkage of desire and power. But the effect of a conscious discursive view of uncensored desire is to generate impossible and self-defeating expectations which produce the experience of despair.

Without sharing Foucault's poststructuralist assumptions about discourse, I think *The History of Sexuality* possesses a powerful insight about the tyranny of desire, which does not depend upon those assumptions. The protest of someone like Bersani (and he is only the latest in a string of writers whom we have considered), that desire in its fragmentary, discontinuous condition, its "natural" condition, so to speak, has been and continues to be repressed, masks the cultural fact that the revolution of desire has in fact succeeded.

What does it mean for the revolution of desire to have succeeded? Does it mean that the reconstruction of the Dionysian ego that Brown advocated has indeed taken place? Or that life has been made over by the sensuousness of art? Or that "surplus repression" is

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a thing of the past? The "revolution" has not been successful on its own terms. Like all revolutionary triumphs, this one is not what its proponents meant at all. It has been first a triumph of discourse, as Foucault has demonstrated. Such a triumph enables new attitudes, permits new feelings, creates new expectations, new power concentrations. But what the "success" has revealed is the vacuity of liberationist talk about desire. The refusal or incapacity of the revolutionaries of desire to acknowledge their "victory" is their refusal or incapacity to acknowledge its bitter fruits. The idea of uncensored desire has infected the various institutions of social life: family, school, workplace, and as with every new "successful" revolution, the revolution of desire has produced its discontents.

Nietzsche perhaps more than any modern philosopher tried to imagine the conditions of a life free of the coercions of all the universalizing institutional forms of life: politics, morality, religion. The alternative for Nietzsche was aesthetic consciousness, which produced its own kind of tyrannical order. Nietzsche does not object to the orderings of art. On the contrary, he rejects "the assumption that human nature is best expressed in perfect freedom," arguing instead that "all that there is or has been on earth of freedom, subtlety, boldness, dance, masterly sureness, whether in thought itself or in government, or in rhetoric and persuasion, in the arts just as in ethics, has developed only owing to 'the tyranny of such capricious laws.'"

What Nietzsche objects to in Christianity, for example, is not its "tyranny," but its dogmatism, its concealment of "the fact that its direction is only one direction among many others." He does not mean to promote the kind of rapid changes of fashion that characterize our postmodernity. In fact, he advocates "*obedience* over a long period of time and in *a single* direction; given that, something always develops, and has developed, for whose sake it is worthwhile to live on earth, for example, virtue, art, music, dance, reason, spirituality." The tyranny that Nietzsche repudiates is not the aesthetic order that constitutes one's personality, an order that is subject to change according to the necessities of one's nature, but the alien imposition of an external order that dogmatically declares itself universal and eternal. Is it now the case that Desire, reified and abstract, has become such an alien order, or should we say, disorder?

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FICTION

Sergei Dovlatov

AUNT MARA

At first, Aunt Mara had worked as a shipping clerk. Then she became a qualified typographer, a linotyper, if I'm not mistaken. Some time later, she moved up to being a copy editor, and after that, a secretary to the editorial board.

And then, for her whole life, she edited other people's books.

My aunt edited the books of many remarkable writers—Tynianov, Zoshchenko, Forsh, to give a few examples. Judging by the personal inscriptions, Zoshchenko thought very highly of her. He kept thanking her for the work they did together.

Auntie was an eye-catching woman, though there was something a little false in her torrid American beauty, as there is in a mountain landscape or Lermontov's romantic verse. She was observant and witty. She had a very good memory. Many of the stories she told have stayed with me to this day. For example, this one.

She happened to meet Mikhail Zoshchenko on the street. The difficult times of official disfavor had already started for him. Zoshchenko turned his head and quickly walked past her.

My aunt caught up with him and asked, "Why aren't you saying hello to me?"

Zoshchenko grinned and said, "Excuse me. I'm trying to make it easy for my friends not to say hello to me."

My aunt edited Yuri Gherman, Kornilov, Seifulina, even Aleksei Tolstoi. She had something to tell about each of them.

One time Olga Forsh was at a resort for writers and was looking through the "Complaint Book." She found the following entry: "We keep finding all kinds of forest insects in the kasha. Not long ago at supper I came upon a large horned beetle."

"What do you think," Forsh asked my aunt, "was it a grievance or a note of thanks?"

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She also told me a story about the poet Boris Kornilov. The chief editor of the publishing house that my aunt worked for, Nikolai Tikhonov, was putting together a literary anthology. He told Aunt Mara, who was his secretary, to go to Boris Kornilov and ask him for some poems. Kornilov refused to contribute.

"I don't give a shit about your Tikhonov," he announced, "so I give you nothing."

Aunt Mara returned and informed Tikhonov, "Kornilov won't give us anything. He says he won't give you a single sheet."

"What he said was, 'He doesn't give a shit about me,'" Tikhonov corrected her irritably. "Is it really so hard to remember?"

She knew a lot of stories about Aleksei Tolstoi, too. Once Aleksei Tolstoi, who was tall and portly, was walking down the hall of the publishing house. My aunt came running from the opposite direction. She was thin and short, and she ran headfirst into Tolstoi's belly.

"Oho!" Tolstoi said, rubbing his stomach. "And what if I had an eye down there?"

My aunt knew a great many humorous literary anecdotes.

Then, on my own, I found out that Boris Kornilov had been shot; that Zoshchenko had lauded the use of slave labor in prison camps; that Aleksei Tolstoi was a scoundrel and a hypocrite; that Olga Forsh had suggested revising all chronology from the moment of birth of a certain Djugashvili (a.k.a. Stalin); that Leonov speculated in rugs during the evacuation; that Vera Inber had signed a petition demanding the execution of her first cousin, Leon Trotsky; that "out of curiosity" Pavlenko had gone to watch Mandelstam's interrogation; that Yuri Olesha betrayed his friend Shostakovich; that the writer Miroshnichenko used to beat his wife with a bicycle pump; and many more such facts.

But what my aunt remembered, for the most part, were the humorous occurrences. I don't fault her for this. Our memory is selective like a ballot box.

I think my aunt was a good editor. That is what I've been told by the writers she edited. Of course, I don't completely understand why an editor is really necessary. If a writer is good, an editor, it would seem, is unnecessary. If the writer is bad, no editor can save him. This has always seemed quite clear to me.

I know how my aunt worked with authors. Sometimes I was even present. For example, she would say, "Yuri, there are four places in this passage where the word 'dank' appears."

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"You're absolutely right," Yuri Pavlovich Gherman would say. "How is it I didn't notice that myself?"

Nevertheless, I still believe a writer doesn't need an editor, even a good writer.

We have, for example, the following historical example. Dostoevsky wrote a sentence in one of his novels that went, "Beside it stood a round table of oval form." Someone reading the work in manuscript said, "Fyodor Mikhailovich, you've made a slip here. It should be corrected."

Dostoevsky thought for a moment and said, "Leave it as it is."

In his early works, Gogol used to use the word "stucko." Once the writer Aksakov said to him, "Why do you write 'stucko'?"

"Why, what's wrong with it?" Gogol asked.

"It should be 'stucco'."

"I don't think so," Gogol said.

"Look it up in the dictionary."

So they got out the Dal' dictionary and looked it up, and there it was—"stucco." From then on, Gogol invariably wrote "stucco," but he didn't correct the mistake in new editions of his works.

Why? Why didn't Dostoevsky want to eliminate a glaring error? Why did Alexandre Dumas call his novel *The Three Musketeers,* though there cannot be any question there are four of them? There are hundreds of instances like this in literature. What becomes apparent is that the errors, the inaccuracies, are in some way dear to the author, which means to the reader as well.

How can you correct Rozanov's line, "We never cried anything like that"?

If it were up to me, I wouldn't even correct typographical errors without the consent of an author. Not to speak of punctuation. Punctuation is something every writer invents for himself.

I think my aunt was a good editor, or rather, she was a good person, full of goodwill and intelligence.

Personally, I have never met good editors, though there were many fine people among those I did meet. Actually, there was one time I met a good editor. It was at "Lenfilm," I think, and it was a certain woman named Hellie Rummo. She was Estonian and barely spoke Russian, and her weak command of the language gave her pronouncements a special clarity. She would say, "The scenario is good. That means they won't take it."

In the 1960s I began writing short stories. I showed my work to my aunt. She found hundreds of mistakes in my stories: stylistic, spelling, and punctuational.

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She said things like, "In this passage you write, 'the kinship of silence and frost'. It's inaccurate. Frost and silence are two different kinds of phenomena. You should write, 'In the forest it was cold and quiet'. Without making it fancy. . . . "

"How can you say that—'in the forest'?" I said in surprise. "The action takes place in a penal isolator."

"Ah, yes," she would say.

Those were the years that she was put in charge of the Consolidation, which chose new manuscripts for publication. As a result, many good writers were published, such as Gansovski and Pikul.

Among others, Joseph Brodsky submitted a manuscript to the Consolidation. My aunt did not accept it. She spoke of his poems this way: "the ravings of a madman." (Actually, Brodsky's poems do have something of that, too.)

They rejected Brodsky, but they accepted many others. In Leningrad there are a great many poets. There are even three different Nekrasovs: Vladimir, Georgi, and Boris.

My aunt was a member of the Party. I don't fault her for this either. Many worthy and honest people joined the ranks of the Communist Party. They were not to blame. They simply wanted to live better, hold higher positions. . . .

Of course, my aunt took it very badly when they persecuted Akhmatova and Zoshchenko. And when they hounded Pasternak to his grave, she became so upset that she even got sick. She said, "This is a politically unsound step. We will lose our prestige in the West. We are partially cancelling out the achievements of the Twentieth Party Congress. . . . "

Over many years, my aunt collected a very fine library. The majority of the books had personal inscriptions from the authors, often touching and tender ones. Valentin Pikul's colorful inscription began with the words, "To the midwife of our souls. . . . "

The inscription that the science-fiction writer Gansovski wrote said: "Across time and space, I give my hand to you!" Not long ago it became known that Gansovski was an informer who denounced his own friends.

Pikul also distinguished himself in this field. At the trial of Kiril Vladimirovich Uspensky, he addressed the defendant this way: "Kiril! All of us here wish only what is good for you, but you continue to lie!" Since the trial took place during a time when liberalism was at its height, Uspensky was given only five years in labor camp. Pikul, though, got an apartment in Riga.

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In her later years, my aunt read a great deal. She didn't reread any of the books with inscriptions. Beside her bed, rather, lay volumes of Akhmatova, Pasternak, Baratynski . . . .

When my aunt died, the library was sold at once. To get it ready for sale, her son and his wife tore out the pages with the inscriptions. Otherwise it would have been more awkward to sell them off.

Not long before this, my aunt had read me some lines of poetry:

> Already midway on the journey of this life
> While I still think I am moving mountains,
> That I plow the fields, that I water valleys,
> While life's already far beyond the midpoint . . .

"Verses of a certain poetess," she said with a smile.

I think she wrote them herself. The lines are clumsy, of course. The first line is literally lifted from Dante. Still, in spite of everything, the poem touched me.

> Already midway on the journey of this life,
> While I still think I am moving mountains . . .

My aunt was mistaken. Her life was coming to its close. The errors could no longer be corrected.

Translated from the Russian by Anne Frydman

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Daniel Moyano

UNSPOKEN WORDS

My son, I knew that I would see you once more before I die. Doña Dora, when she talks to me, often says my son is an ungrateful thing and I'll never see him again. Your visit, which can be nothing but a show of affection, is proving how wrong she was.

I'm a little ashamed that you find me in this condition, which I'm now used to. For me the degradation until getting to this stage has been very slow, and my situation doesn't surprise me now when, by coming here, you set me once more back into the world of desires. Besides, I'm the actor in this situation. But for you, who played no part in the small events which put me in this place, my illness is a sudden thing; and since, besides, you are the spectator, no doubt I'm now a terrible thing for you to see.

I look at you and it seems a lie to have you so near. I haven't seen you for many years. You've kissed me and now you talk to me about so many things, carefully choosing, as everyone does, words which require no answers. So I know beforehand everything you can say to me. You even use the same tone of voice which everyone uses with me, as if it were a suitable tone to contact my memory directly. You speak to me and meanwhile I delight in looking for this short time at the features of your face, your civilian dress, and your hands, which resemble mine so much. I think if it weren't for the paralysis, I would pass my hand over your head, caress it as in other days there in our little house in La Rioja.

Although I don't know if it would stir me. You came through that door suddenly, as if you were the extension of my constant thoughts and desires. Often, when I saw you triumph, a tremor ran over my whole body. Now I don't feel my body, I see its parts as if they didn't belong to me, but when I saw you enter, I felt a kind of choking. For a moment it seemed my body was going to come alive. So I lose nothing by being paralyzed because I don't know if I'd have dared to touch you. To me you've always been something unattainable. But I know you are my nerves, my cells, and that's why I feel proud. I knew I would still see you once before I die; something

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told me so. And if I had been able to talk and tell you that instead of feeling it as I do, I already knew what you would have answered: Don't say that. You're going to live many years yet. That's what is said in circumstances like this. But supposing I am going to live a few more years, since our relationship is measured in years and events very far apart in time, since it's necessary for so many years to go by for me to see you, it is fair to think now that this is the last time. Even you would admit it has been so many years since we've seen one another and that time it wasn't a visit, we were together hardly fifteen minutes because you were very busy with an imminent journey. It is a way of reasoning very much yours, a product of your great intelligence, capable of demonstrating anything. Yet we must have laughed with your mother at that ability you've had since you were a child. But this time I have a very sure proof against your possible arguments, which demonstrates that we haven't seen one another for a long time and are almost two strangers: just now, involuntarily, I made the necessary sign with my eyes for doña Dora or Luisito to change my position in the chair. I have different gestures for them to set a pillow behind my head or put me to bed. They know each one. It went unnoticed by you, and that shows you haven't seen me in many years.

But this is not a reproach. I feel very happy at this moment. Now I know it's true that you have a little love for your father, and that it could not be otherwise. Doña Dora doesn't know what she says. She doesn't love you. She's half crazy. You mustn't pay any attention to what she says. But I love her very much because she is a companion to me and because she brought me here after they retired me. I don't know what would have become of me if she hadn't taken me to the pensione, because I went more than a year without drawing a cent.

But neither the years gone by nor what can be said or thought matters any longer. In the first moments of contemplation, I already felt everything had gone back in some way to the beginning because your face is as familiar as if I saw it every day; for you, my son, are the same as always, always staunch in life and ready to change the world. I am the only novelty here, with this illness of which you alone were made aware by letter. I was a little ashamed, for an instant, for you to see me in this state, but now this too seems a familiar and long-known thing.

I should have liked meeting you—wholly, as now, and on your own initiative—in earlier years, when my heart was still strong and

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there was promise of a long life ahead. I often sought that occasion, but it never came because the desire would have had to be mutual. But I thought then, and I think now, that you were making your own life and I had no right to interrupt it. The right moment comes a little late, when I cannot even move or communicate. I should really have liked to be able to return to our town with you one day and tell everybody This is my son. There was a woman from Santa Fe, the lead drummer's wife, who didn't believe I had a son who was a colonel. It wasn't that she didn't believe, but she looked at me as if mocking or doubting when I spoke of my son. Look, señora, this is my son, I'd say, and she'd feel ashamed and hurry for a glass to serve us a wine from the coast, and we'd drink and we'd all laugh. But anyway this meeting fulfills all my desires because at last it brings what I wanted so badly. Of course, it embarrasses me a little that my situation may make you uncomfortable. I'm very old now and actually I don't know why I would need to be moved, I don't know where I'd go. Besides, don't think I've given up. Luisito always talks about a rehabilitation center where they perform absolute miracles. It's very possible that at the end of the year I'll try it out. Perhaps we can still go back to La Rioja together someday and drink a toast with that coastal wine you yourself like.

The head drummer's wife (Bermudez's wife, you may remember him, he was a showman in the parades) always used a doubtful tone when I spoke about you. I went to their house Saturdays to eat with them, and then we played cards. That night we had finished eating and she was wiping the table with a damp rag so the cards wouldn't be stained. I had been retired for several months and things weren't going very well so they were always helping me in one way or another. During the meal I had been talking about leaving La Rioja to be nearer you (I don't remember if at the time you were in Buenos Aires or Cordoba), and she doubted that too. She refused to accept what I was saying, she treated me like an old man who doesn't know what he's saying. I told her I had a letter from Margarita, in which she let me know that if I wanted to, I could live with you. She made one of her classic faces and asked to see the letter. I didn't have it with me so I felt a little humiliated, as if there were no letter, but I told her I'd show it to her the next day. She went to the kitchen to get the cards and from there said if the letter had been from you, it would have meant something, but she put no faith in the letter from Margarita. Then, raising my voice so she'd hear, a bit annoyed by her attitude, I said if Margarita said something, it was because she

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relied on your approval. Then she came back and, tossing the cards onto the table, said, "Come on, don Blas, you're too old and too intelligent besides to believe such things." Bermudez made a grimace of disgust and shuffled the cards.

The woman's attitude left me upset, doubting. All through the game I was thinking you really despised me, you didn't love me, you felt ashamed of me. I had never felt anything so terrible. I was used to losing things in life, but I was not resigned to losing the only thing I had left. I remembered many of your attitudes, judging them wrongly, apart from their circumstances, and I realized that in each of them the woman was right when she said—not in words, but yes in gestures, and at times in meaningful monosyllables—not only nothing about me mattered to you, but there was even something else. That something was contempt. "But, come, Don Blas, we haven't got all night," the lead drummer said, raising my spirits. That night he made a lot of signs to his wife, as if telling her that she was to blame for my frame of mind and she shouldn't say another word about those things.

I went to bed uneasy, certain that the woman was right. For many years I hadn't minded being alone, living alone, but that night I realized the house had always been deserted and I was alone. I couldn't sleep. At a single glance I could see all the events that had taken place from the time my son was born till that moment; but run together that way they told me nothing, so I began to analyze them one by one, discovering details long since forgotten.

That night was very important for me. I discovered that the woman was right, that I'd always known it, but that I'd hidden it from myself, perhaps to insist it wasn't true. What she had wrong was the word, because it was not contempt you felt for me (of that you gave me several proofs), but shame. Since you were a child you've been ashamed of your father. You had begun to live in another world, you had other friendships, different tastes, and that made me glad because it meant you would have a great future. For me it was important that you have it because from the time you were very small you were timid, you had a terrible fear of the world and things. To assure your future beforehand was the best way of doing away with those fears which made you a child silent and set apart, with no friends and no love. That's why the fact that you were ashamed of your father never offended me. That's how you saved yourself from the precariousness of the small world I could offer you. And even admitting that my son despised me, as I said to the

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woman, what did that mean? Could I stop loving you because of your contempt? Did someone prevent my loving you as I loved you? The supposed contempt was one of your problems, which even increased my affection because it grieved me to see you suffer for a problem which, as far as I was concerned, did not exist. Your contempt, if it did exist, did not stop me from loving you. And since you didn't prevent it, my love was satisfied with the sole fact that they did not prevent its existence.

Almost every afternoon, when they take me out onto the gallery, Luisito stops in front of me and says, "And now, esteemed don Blas, I'm going to act out another pantomine for you. Today's is about a servant who takes five children walking on the square." That was the last one. Using the apron as if it were a dress, he moves and walks like a woman who is trying to get someone to look at her, but the children, who play different tricks, don't let her prance about freely. When she succeeds in attracting someone's attention, she has to go running brusquely, losing all her elegance, to catch one of the children, who wants to run into the street or blow his nose or even do other indecent acts in public. He knows he can't make me laugh, at least overtly, but he must tell from my eyes that the scene amuses me. So since he doesn't need my laughter or my words to encourage his task, he transfers his shame to me. Of course, at times I do show my joy. Some pantomimes are so comical that my eyes fill with tears of pure pleasure. When he notices them, he stops acting, dries my tears with the apron, and leaves, perhaps considering the situation is too much for me. What the poor man doesn't know is that at times I neither hear nor see him because I'm very sad; and then, seeing that all his efforts to entertain me are useless, my eyes fill with tears, but of pain—for me, for my situation, and for him too. He is unaware of that hidden process, so believes I'm crying from pleasure. And if he did notice it (I believe I've sometimes seen worry on his face), it would be impossible for him to know when I am crying from grief or when I am crying for joy.

You have no children, so perhaps you don't really know the meaning of paternity. I believe having a child is very important in this life. I have been watching your features while you've been talking to me, your eyes, your forehead, your hands, and even now, old and defeated, I feel the same thing I felt when I saw you growing up, that security and at the same time that forgetfulness which places one in the center of the world, I mean that makes one feel his own existence. The child, when born, hurts us but gives us at the same

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time the assurance of our own bodies, as if the open wound showed us once and for all that we had been existing and that existence itself is going. I got married somewhat late. Your mother, who lived such a short life, passed through my house like a dream and left me my son, already grown, but weak still and full of fear of the world. For me fatherhood was an event so important that it changed not only my life then but my earlier life. All that I had lived up to that moment came to be a fact which my memory retained only by imposition, not because it had any importance. I felt, when I could call myself father, when my son was born, that my life had begun, in another way, to lack meaning, at least the meaning it had had before. I felt that my son prolonged my life a little more, saved me from the sorrows which I felt then and which were announcements of my paralysis. And I must also say that in some moments I felt being a father was a tearing apart, something related to animals, those creatures we call animals, which feel but do not seem to notice pain. No doubt, a less cruel form of prolongation in time belongs to us men, and I should have preferred to divide like amoebas, because in any case that division did not mean a rending asunder but a final and decisive action which ended then and there. When you began to grow up, I was tortured by the suffering of seeing you in the situation of permanent struggle with the hostile world which I knew too well, I saw and felt your small body and weak bones, and I was afraid of earthquakes, thieves, bats, and I don't know how many other things. I began to go to the library to read books that might help me protect you, books about diseases, work, and earth, astronomy, and in general books related to whatever surrounded you above or below, intending to protect you. That anguish fortunately soon passed. You grew, gradually acquired that expression of yours which means security and mastery of the world. Afterwards I discovered that no danger could now spy you out. Then I began to fear for myself; I suffered under the presumption that I might fail you and not help you at some moment in your life. But at the same time you were alive, articulating your first words, and at those moments I almost wanted to die, to see if with my death I made your existence more secure.

Nonetheless, that was the happiest time. Your momma, whom you resemble so much, was still alive. Separation and fear were remote things. In the first place, because, with the first cycle completed, separation seemed to have ended, and in that case the definitive act of division of the amoeba had been completed, so that

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all cruelty had disappeared from the smile you gave me and your mother. In the second place, fear was no longer a permanent cause because you had established all the relationships and harmonies with the world which we had given you; you had imperishable connections with buildings and months, cities and seasons. The earth's cycles were completed for you; summers succeeded winters in a perfect round in harmony with my son's life.

Afterward, your connection with the world broadened. From the perfect familiarity with the house, and even neighboring houses; with the street, whose dangers you soon learned to avoid; and with your parents, whom you learned to know, you went to primary school, to the life of relationships, and from there to the mastery of men, whose lives, as a military man, you are now used to commanding. I observed it all and felt that the sundering had not ended yet, the forboding amoeba disappeared and returned to the long childbirth of animals under the moon, according to what I had glimpsed in I don't know what place.

But in that lapse into total happiness everything was given in plenty. My later error was searching for something similar in what remained of my life, when circumstances had changed. Of that lapse I can say it is like that inviolate part of infancy which one usually remembers, where there is nothing, not even memories, which can alter that pure passing. My infancy lay in you, in yours, and no one can take that away from me, neither the lead drummer's wife nor my son's contempt or shame. It was the time when I caressed you. You were my son, you had no defenses, I looked after you desperately; my son loved me too in his innocence; he looked at me, laughed, stretched his arms out to me, sought my protection. Then things changed. He began to be ashamed of me, the old man. Of course, years had gone by.

I wouldn't have liked remembering the matter of the letters, but just now, while you were talking to me, trying to adapt the meaning and subject of your words to a listener who could answer nothing, referring to events and things which you think may interest me, you made several mistakes which show me that most of the letters were not read. Margarita had already told me that, years before. "Dad, it's better not to write so many letters. At times we're not at home for several months, and when he return, Victor finds he has so many letters from you that he puts off reading them and finally many letters go unread." Margarita didn't tell the truth either, because you were never away so many months. I know too, from

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Olga, that important letters were forwarded. I realize I wrote too much. I did it on those nights of such frequent insomnia. At times I wrote two letters in a single night, but I sent them a week or two apart. I didn't expect answers. I made that clear in many letters. I wrote only because I needed to, because I believed I had to tell you things you should know. In some letters, certainly, I reproached you for your lack of love, your indifference; I complained because I believed my son did not love me. I understood that this annoyed you, like when "I spied on you," as you violently told me, but I couldn't avoid it. That day you insulted me for the first time; you said, among other things, I should be thankful I'm your father because otherwise your attitude would have been far different. I think that night you might have hit me. There was such hate in your look. It was after the episode in the men's room, which I'm ashamed of, when you stepped over me while I was down on the floor looking for my glasses, thinking I hadn't seen you. Possibly when you insulted me, you got rid of the fury caused by the episode in the men's room. You left a nightclub with other people, undoubtedly military, although all in civilian dress. It was very late. I had taken a walk downtown because of my insomnia. It wasn't that I had gone looking for you there; they had simply told me you frequented that place, and I went near the door on the chance I'd see you. That's all. I wasn't even going to speak if I saw you. For many months I hadn't been able to find you at home, and I couldn't miss the chance of seeing you and feeling consoled by such a simple act. You, when you saw me, didn't give me time to slip away as at other times in other places, and, clutching your head, you insulted I don't know whom with all your fury. Did you believe I'd tell Margarita you came out of a place like that with another woman? If you thought that, it was because you didn't know your father very well. Your insult was so emphatic that your friends stopped to ask you what had happened. I was standing against the wall, terrified by what I had done. Suddenly you jerked your hands from your head and, pointing, your arm thrust out at me, you said to your friends, "That son of a bitch is my father." I swear to you it was like a knife in me. Luckily the effect your words were having on me, the humiliation and shame I began to feel (not at the words but because you had said them) were interrupted and gave way to the fear caused by seeing you come toward me, take me by the lapels and slam me against the wall. Your friends took you by the arms and freed me. Otherwise perhaps you'd have beaten me up. No doubt you were about to say something else to

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me, but the policeman, whom you also badly insulted when he came to ask you what was happening, prevented it. One of your friends took out his military ID and showed it to the policeman and at once you all got into the auto. I was straightening out my clothes. The policeman murmured something, and when I approached to say something to him, because I was terribly ashamed, he said what perhaps you would have said if he hadn't interrupted: "And you—get out of here once and for all. Beat it right now." The automobile had disappeared by the time I really heard or finished hearing his insult. They were hard words, which had suddenly transformed you and, in a certain way, me. But I'd no sooner heard the words than a part of me hid them in a very secret place so I could forget them, so I in some way wouldn't find that place.

Never would I have told you this, son. I kept it in that unknown part which does not belong to me, and it has never left that place. Nor could I say you made me suffer. I understood you. And a proof of how right I was is that kiss you just gave me when you came in. Had I hung onto that earlier event, you'd have shown me now that I was wrong.

That night, after leaving the lead drummer's house, I remembered all this and much more. If she hadn't said to me, "Come now, don Blas, I'm surprised that you still believe certain things," referring to the help you'd have given me and making your possible affection doubtful, perhaps those memories would have remained in that secret place where I'm used to keeping things which can hurt me. The ugly side of the matter is that after the memory of each episode came another one, worse. I decided to bring it all out in the open to get rid of it all, so the next day I would confront the lead drummer's wife and defend my son.

And the result was excellent. The candid part of me said it was dangerous to dredge from my secret part the things I'd always feared: it could mean beating my head against the wall. But the woman's voice, which had then come from the kitchen to the table where I was sitting, came to me now in bed and demanded that I do it. I opened that door with great fear. Once, when I was very young, I discovered something in the rear patio and forgot the matter. An aunt of mine used to have nocturnal visions and cried out in the middle of the night, asking them to help her and protect her from certain creatures which came to devour her while she was sleeping. We looked for the strange things in every possible hiding place, but with no luck. I remember I tore the canvas over the attic hole with a long

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stick and poked inside until I touched the corners, but the things did not appear. Then somebody told my aunt that by burying I don't know what very strange objects inside a bottle, at the end of the patio, the creatures would disappear and she would sleep peacefully. My aunt made fun of the advice, but I carried it out. In a room out back, full of all kinds of objects, I looked for God knows what and put them in a bottle, which I buried. I forgot the matter completely, and sometime after I remembered and began to look for the place where the bottle might be, but full of doubt because in the long run I didn't know if it had really happened or I'd dreamed it.

The point is that I found the bottle and at the moment of opening it I was very afraid because I didn't know what horrible things I'd put in it. I then opened the part of me where oblivion and also memory lay, and I let the things out. At that moment I seemed to see that from the bottom of the bottle came some enormous black birds with red eyes which stared at me, perhaps the same birds my aunt had seen.

One of the things which came out of the bottle was the comet. Until then, when my son denied anything I said, his denial made me glad at heart: "He's a man," I thought. But at the matter of the comet I was somewhat saddened for the first time, because it seemed to me he believed none of the things I said. And it grieved me also because when I talked about the comet, I did so handing on to him facts, knowledge which I had looked up in the library precisely for him when I wanted to protect him from everything which surrounded him and sought laboriously in books (many of them recommended by the lead drummer; I remember the beautiful bound volumes of Reclus's *The Earth,* which had such an aura of mystery), among such a quantity of books, security for that face I had thrust into the world. I was already used to the fact that everything I did or said was a mistake or defect, but the comet I hadn't invented; wise men who had spent their lives studying the facts wrote of the comet. It was an extremely calm night. You were already asleep—I think it was very late. I had been copying musical scores. Through the window Vargas, the cornetist, struck his head and asked if I'd seen the comet. He seemed frightened. I had heard about it, but I had not seen it yet. I went out to the patio and there it was in the middle of the sky, with its head and its immense tail giving off fire. I watched it an instant and smiled, filled with an immense joy. Something I had read in lifeless print was there, demonstrating truth. I intended to go wake you immediately to show you that wonder and show you that what I

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had told you about comets was true, but Vargas, quite excited, didn't stop talking, relating country superstitions filled with terrors. It was evident he didn't believe what he was saying, but the subject delighted him. I half-listened because I began to think how afraid of stars you were. The first time you saw them consciously you were afraid they'd fall down on you. Everything I could explain to you about that impossibility was useless. When you didn't understand a thing, you scowled, shut your eyes tight, and said, "It can't be," and then refused to go on talking about the matter. One time, you didn't want to accept the earth's forming part of the Milky Way. It was one of your father's many mistakes. The cornetist soon forgot the comet and went on talking about other things. When I stopped thinking about the matter of the Milky Way and listened attentively again, he was talking about the salaries they had promised us and the possibility that the legislature would not approve the new tax because there was feeling against it among the representatives. Happily, he left and I hurried to your room. "Son, come see the comet," I said. You didn't hear me very well, you let me take you and dress you, but when we got to the patio and you opened your eyes and saw that ball of fire in the sky, you looked at me as if terrified. There was a neighboring cornfield which could be seen almost as if it were daylight. Nearby the cocks were crowing, and the dogs were barking in the distance. You asked me to put you down. When I did so, you looked toward the comet and in your expression there was, I believe, a flash of acceptance. You looked at me as if telling me you were surprised to verify what you had once believed to be legend or error in your father's mouth. I felt proud. You asked me several questions which I answered rapidly. Do you remember? Mane. Tail. I knew many things about comets. That grimace of doubt came over your face when I stated that the comet would return to earth in seventy-six years. I said you would see it again and that was a real piece of luck because many people went through life without being able to see a comet. You went to bed right away. Your mother was anxious to put you back in bed as if she too feared the comet. I stayed up a while watching until it began to fade. Then I went to bed thinking that the permanent disbelief you had about everything must be something fundamental, some primary confidence, but I failed to imagine what it could be. I was afraid it might be something dangerous. Afterwards I fell asleep with an answer which earlier, referring to other events, the lead drummer had given me: your denials were nothing more than forms of your security, they were

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demonstrations that you were already a man. The next day, when you got up, I was in the patio and, pointing a finger at the sky, I said as soon as I saw you, "The street of the comet." You didn't look up, but it seems you smiled. I was very satisfied that day.

That night while I was remembering the comet, I couldn't get out of my head the face of the lead drummer's wife when she'd told me I was too old to go on believing in certain things. If I told her about the comet, no doubt she'd have used the same expression of triumph or certainty like telling me that that was one more proof of my son's feelings toward me. The truth is she humiliated me a little; but still there was much more to it and I must get to the bottom of my shame in order to know, according to what I'd glimpsed, that all that was nothing, that my face, my form, *father,* and his face, his form, *son,* still endured and that the life relationship was indestructible despite all there might be inside the bottle.

Because one is only his own irreplaceable form, with his nose, which can be a beautiful memory, his ears, the cut of his face, like those caricatures some people make. Once they made one of me. "Yes, that's me," I had to admit when I looked at it, because it couldn't be anybody but me. One is only his form, which limits him to the rest of the world. Inside are the viscera and all the rest, but one is finally that, the oval of the head, the total form barely constricted into the neck, eyes, arms which fake sinuosities and then straight lines toward the ground, terminating in still tips which are displaced by the earth. One is finally a form which contains a single life and a single death. One is a kind of jail in which he is condemned to live and die. But there is something which saves him when he imagines the total existence of another being (his form and what it contains) and feels suddenly that that other being responds, and then those forms, touched by love, unite and feel they are no longer single forms, single jails, but share the wondrous world. When one has felt that, when one has felt touched by that vision of forms which is called love, then what do death and oblivion matter, what does all the rest matter if in some way he feels that all the other beings are responding for one, are affirming the precariousness of their own limitations. For that reason, discovering now that you love me, I feel, son, that my life is totally fulfilled. So it is beautiful to be alive, to feel that all the beings in the world—those who are near, even those one doesn't know, and those who are in other latitudes—respond to one, accompany him in the world, are with him to assure him of his own existence. I can tell you that it has been beautiful to

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be alive and that I am thankful for having been able to live in this form and in this world.

That night I had wanted to go rapidly over the events of your childhood to bring to light other, more recent and painful events and master them as quickly as possible, but my glance into time lingered too long and I had to consider others, as if the comet itself had illuminated them. If I had not remembered the comet, perhaps those other tangential events would have remained in forgetfulness. And seeking some blame, some act which had hurt my son, I remembered that twenty-fifth of May, the parade in which my son was standard-bearer and suffered because I didn't want to go see him in the parade. Your mother and you reproached me severely the next day. I was silent. And all that I kept silent within me, I said to myself then before the memory of the stern face of the lead drummer's wife, as if she demanded it of me. I remembered then that before that twenty-fifth of May there was another. The square was full of people and soldiers. The military mass had ended and the white rows of students converged on the flag to render their homage. Your mother and I tried to locate the place your school would occupy. We were on the corner by the cathedral. In those years I was afraid of time; I mean, I was afraid that time would pass. La Rioja is surrounded by mountains, it is small and there everybody knows everybody else. The familiar and identical faces and the near mountains always gave me the sensation of confinement. I was brought up on the plains, where one is always free. There, among the mountains and the repetitive faces, I felt time go by quickly, I felt it hurt us day after day. I had begun to discover I don't know what horrible adult form in your young face. The schools had begun the procession and I was looking at those thousands of faces among which yours would later appear. Hundreds of faces passed before me, dark, red, white, and all of them, the order of march from youngest to oldest, indicated that time had passed and went on passing. When it was your school's turn, you went by without looking at us. No doubt any least distraction would break the solemnity of the event. We respected the importance you gave to such things as parades and patriotic emblems. For us they had no importance but we accepted them because they had our son's reverence. You were the flag escort. Your mother and I noticed, besides the solemnity of your action, that your face seemed tormented. That morning, while you were dressing, you said something which made us understand you were disgusted because you'd have liked being the standard-bearer but were only

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the escort. You were the most martial. My eyes filled with tears, your mother's did too. I don't know why she was crying, but I did know why I was: because time had passed, because you had become a man, little one, who suddenly had to confront the world with the stars on high and the endless round of seasons and all the dangers of the world. Among thousands, your face had passed; it was something I had given to mankind: a face, a form. I did not turn to see your back. I kept looking at the other faces, adults too in endless repetition. Then I saw that your mother had turned to watch you from behind. I remember well your mother's profile against the sun. The voice over the loudspeaker was now announcing the passing of the next school before the official stand—the industrial school, "the country's reserve," according to the speaker. For that reason I didn't want to go to the parade the following year, when you had become standard-bearer. While you were dressing, with that fastidiousness of yours, you didn't show that being standard-bearer delighted you. I said so to your mother and she said yes you were happy, but that your face showed displeasure because you knew I wouldn't go to the parade. I'd like to have explained my reasons to you, but I was ashamed to. When I tried to kiss you goodbye you turned your face away. But I didn't ascribe that action to your momentary anger because at other times you had turned your face away when I tried to kiss you. That was simply part of your character, so I didn't believe, contrary to your mother's fears, that you were upset with me because I wasn't going to the parade. Besides, if I had said, "Son, I'm not going because I'm afraid of time passing," you'd really have been offended. But that night I realized that your mother was right. You didn't come home to supper or join us afterward to see the fireworks as we had agreed. When you later opened the front door—from the house you could hear the explosions of the fireworks which were beginning—and saw I was waiting for you in the front room, you turned to the corridor and went into the kitchen. You went straight to bed. In a while I went to your bed to say goodnight. You didn't answer, though you were awake. I felt a great humiliation, shame, something like that. I wanted to kneel and ask your forgiveness. I believe that night I began to suffer the insomnia which since, with age, came to be more frequent and longer. I couldn't sleep. I got up and went out to the garden. I leaned against the fence and saw high in the sky one of those fireworks. It resembled a quick comet. I remembered that night years back, when you were very young and, wrapped in a blanket, your body nestled against mine because you were afraid of the unfamiliar fire.

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If it hadn't been for that woman's attitude, I'd never have dredged all those things out of myself. Never would I have said them to anyone, not even my son, and if he himself had demanded I tell them, I'd have refused, saying those things were absolutely mine and therefore would remain inside me. The truth is that I remembered some and dwelled on the details, on lapses of time, and beyond them I spied hundreds of similar things. And to alleviate that shame which remembering them caused me, the aggression they signified, I recalled instead others in which no doubt I was primarily to blame, so as to tell the woman afterward that you really had reasons to be ashamed of me. Then I remembered the incident in the men's room, painful because it happened in silence on both sides. Seeing it clearly, the insult at the nightclub was preferable to the terrible silence of that night.

We had seen each other for a few minutes, several days before. You were getting ready for a trip and gave me the money to return to La Rioja. I didn't go back but went to a friend's house. I was anxious to see you, that's all, and I don't know how I learned you were attending a banquet in a downtown hotel. I think I saw the news in the paper. I knew you had the obsession that I followed you, spied on you, so I was very careful that night. I simply wanted to see what that meal was like, how you shone among so many distinguished people. I entered through the employees' entrance and hid in the men's room. From there I could see you perfectly. The table was immense and there were many officers with their wives. Margarita was one of the most beautiful. They were laughing and eating. The men's room was perfect to see from. Only two officers came in during more than half an hour, to urinate and comb their hair. One said, "What's wrong, old boy?" I said I was perfectly all right. Then I amused myself listening to an argument between two waiters and I didn't notice that you had gotten up and were coming to the men's room. You walked with quick, determined steps, with a serious expression very different from the almost permanent smile you wore at the table. I hit on the idea of taking my glasses off and dropping them on the floor and kneeling to look for them. When you opened the door, it struck my shoe. I looked up as if to explain I'd gone in there by chance and was looking for my glasses, but I couldn't say a word. You looked at me angrily and I remembered many things. For a moment I was afraid, but you raised one foot, then another and stepped over me, and I kept looking for my glasses. We were both pretending we didn't see one another. When I tried to leave, I had bad luck—the service entrance was closed at that hour, so I had to

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cross the dining room, where you were all eating. Clinging close to the wall, I walked with fear and shame. I think there was a mirror on the wall; and although I didn't look at myself in it, I knew I was out of place there. The lights grew brighter and brighter as I neared the exit. Margarita saw me too, I'm sure. I couldn't avoid her eyes being directed toward the wall I was edging slowly along, bent so that at least some wouldn't see me. When I reached the door the porter looked at me surprised. I smiled, with effort I kept the smile on my face until I was out of the porter's gaze; then I felt the muscles in my face as heavy as if my cheeks had been about to fall. I decided to go back to La Rioja that very night, but I was aware that I hadn't enough for the fare since I'd spent some. I could ask my friend, but I hadn't the heart to. But actually I was thinking of returning and all that so as not to think of the humiliation I was experiencing, the blame which caused me such anguish. The worst thing of all was that you hadn't said a thing to me, that you hadn't at least insulted me. I felt we were two strangers and there was no longer any possible contact between us. I realized then that all my attitude toward you was only imbecility, ridiculousness. But I couldn't avoid that because I wanted to see you, I needed to be near you, to have some form of communication. If to that inevitable necessity on my part the absurdity or ridiculousness were added, the result was the certainty that you were already for me a lost cause. That night I ended up in a tavern. Some boys bought me a couple of drinks. I recited them a good bit of *Martin Fierro* by heart.

I don't know what you could be saying to Luis now. I paid no attention to the beginning of the conversation, and now your words make no sense. At first I understood everything. You were asking Luis things about me, and he answered others, because what you were asking didn't apply to my situation. Then he tried to ask you how one communicated with me and he said several times, "Come, don Blas, now tell me if you want me to put you to bed. Well, don Blas, if you want me to take you to the bathroom," waiting for me to move my eyes to one side or the other, but I didn't want to do it, I didn't want my son to know how these things are done. And if you stay until dinnertime I'm going to be awfully ashamed for you to know how they feed your father, the man who knew so many things.

Everything comes in due time. Forced prostration has brought me almost to the doors of wisdom (imagine what wisdom must mean to me). I am no longer impatient, and if I had been able to think this way before, I'd never have followed you through so many streets and

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cities. Besides, it is through waiting that desire matures. It is good to see the day unfurl, feel the movement of the earth like something which is happening intimately. The seasons, once feared, are now the very existence of one who feigns beautiful changes. Memories themselves are a form of permanence, life arrested, not buried, which is always within hand's reach, which is always a new possibility of living. When I was a young father and you an indifferent son, your coldness made me despair. You never performed spontaneous acts of affection and hardly accepted my own. That time I was sick you came into my room twice, but said nothing. When the doctor left and our fears vanished, your mother, joyful, embraced me in bed and wept against me. "I was afraid something awful had happened to you," she said. After, she got up and in her great happiness said, "Victor, come hug your father because he's all right, he's not sick." You came in shortly after and stood beside my bed. It was an embarrassing situation for us both. I felt like somebody who had deliberately hurt himself to get protection. You hesitated, I don't know what you must have felt, and because you hesitated so long, I extended my arms and said, "Come, son, give your father a hug," feeling, shamefully, that I was begging an action of love which otherwise might not have come. You climbed up on my bed, first let me hug you and then you yourself hugged me. But you didn't give me the kiss I expected. That attitude of yours was the cause, for years, of secret shames. That lost kiss came now, all these years later, as if it had been seeking until now the perfect moment of maturation. What good, then, is impatience? The adult son who kissed me just now is the same son who had no desire to bend over my bed when I was sick. I understand now that your mother was right: "It isn't that he doesn't love you; that's the way he is." But I needed a lifetime to realize that. Luckily, meanwhile my desire has ripened into possession.

All those things I thought about in bed, tossing and turning as if to run from some of them. Suddenly I remembered I hadn't looked for Margarita's letter in which she invited me to spend a few days with you both and which I had promised to the lead drummer's wife. I got up and went through some cabinets, but I realized it would be very hard to find because it was a very old letter. To go back without the letter was shameful, so I decided to write one in which I told myself that you and Margarita wanted me to live with you because I was old and mustn't be in La Rioja going without. I recognize that it was a shameful act. Afterward I leaned against the fence, looking at

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the sky and again I remembered the comet. Above, there was a perfectly formed path along which the comet, full of fire, would pass many years later when my son would be as old as I then was. And now it no longer grieved me that time had passed, as it did that time at the parade. I had begun to understand the ultimate truth of things.

The vision of the comet's path made me stop continuing to pull things out of those dark deeps in me. Your absence was very long but your return so certain that I was ashamed of the smallness of my actions. I tore up the letter I'd written myself to show my friend's wife. Neither the letter nor the woman herself was important any longer.

I went to bed again, determined to think no more about all that, but the black birds kept emerging from the depths of the bottle. The action of my will kept many inside, but I couldn't stop watching those already in flight. Some of those birds were Lanús, Liniers, Pompeya, Buenos Aires. At that period you were the follower. I rented cheap rooms in one place and another (I had a woman), trying to hide from you so you wouldn't find out about my poverty. But at times I'd come home and my neighbors would say, "Some military man was here. He left this card." I had to go see you then and you reproached me for "the scandalous life" I was leading. Another time you sent two soldiers to fumigate my room. They took my papers and clothes and burned everything in the patio. You told me it was because of the filth so you'd ordered them to burn it all. But among them were papers valuable to me, photographs, souvenirs, newspaper clippings, documents. My companion and I decided then to move, but your soldiers always arrived and harassed us, or you appeared and left those cards. After that the revolts began and you stopped following us. You appeared in the newspapers. When my neighbors and friends heard me say I was your father many of them laughed at me, but many others believed it. Finally we went to live in Boedo, where we rented a garage. There my woman died and I went back to Cordoba, where doña Dora took me in. Then came my illness and with it my lucidity, my understanding of so many things.

But the day after that night I went back to the lead drummer's house. We had played three hands of truco when the woman asked me about the letter. I played the fool, answering half in truth, half in jest, telling her in a little while I'd pull it out of my inside pocket. I loved making her laugh, acting out different personalities and disguising my voice. She was very simple and laughed at anything pro-

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vided I said it. Then I talked like a circus magnician when he announces he's going to pull something out of the bottom of his hat. In five minutes, I said, I'm going to pull three letters from my pocket. After, gradually, I arranged them so I could talk about the comet. The woman opened her enormous eyes. I invented such stories about the comet that she was amazed for the rest of the night. Then I slipped away, under the moon, smoking a cigar the lead drummer had given me.

They were very good people. He was from Malanzán. In summer they invited me to share their fruit. Try them, don Blas, these are peaches from Malanzán, she'd say. He had a little house there, with an orchard, and every year he received crates of fruit. I remember him especially for the fall he took one day. A military government had taken over the province, and we had to march and play. I came with the drums, after the cornets, but I could see him perfectly, at the head of the column, making pirouettes in the air with his baton. He handled it very well. When he reached the corner by the bank, they ordered a right flank and he tried to change hands, flinging the baton into the air, but it fell a couple of yards away, and he went down on all fours a few yards from the official stand where the military inspector was. A lot of people burst into laughter. He never mentioned the matter. Afterward he raised the baton in the most dignified way possible and continued brandishing it with even greater skill as if nothing had happened. Later he received a serious dressing down.

It seems, son, you want to leave and are trying to hit on a strategic exit so I won't be upset. Luis has suggested leaving, it seems, and that shows he doesn't know me as he should either. Your leaving won't affect me as they think. I've come to an understanding of many things. I've seen you, I've heard you, I've received the kiss postponed since your childhood, and my desires have been satisfied. From now on, although I may not see you again, I shall be able to spend many hours and days in the contemplation and renewed enjoyment of this meeting. Everything has happened so quickly, you arrived so unexpectedly, that I shall need a lot of time to assimilate so many really beautiful things. I shall look at that threshold and tell myself you came through it and sat in that chair looking at me and talking to me although I heard very little you said. I don't perceive words now, but attitudes. Those are what are worthwhile. I see you restless, anxious to leave. Perhaps this causes you pain. You don't know how to leave so you seek Luis's help. I myself turn to him for help. Although I'd

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like to keep you here forever, I know that's not possible. You have to go on living your life to fulfill a great destiny. You must see the comet. Right away, when Luis looks at me, I make my eyes move so he understands I am tired and want him to put me to bed. But first I'll do one thing: I'll indicate to him that I want you yourself to take me. It will be like giving you back the kiss you've given me.

Luis understood the sign for changing places perfectly, but he had a little difficulty capturing my desire that you move me. You smile with a flash of your mother in your eyes and lift me in your arms. Now my cup is filled to overflowing, every hope ended. As if you were my father, I feel like a child again, needing affection.

Now I'd like you to go as quickly as possible. At once they'll have to relieve me, wash and prepare me for supper, and I don't want you to experience these things. I'll give Luis instructions to hand on to you my drum, which earned me my living. Lately, I've been quite doubled up. I don't want you to carry away a painful image of your father. I know I'm not worthy of you, but I don't want your memory of me to be more disagreeable than my condition. I would like you, in the many years you have left to live, to remember me as a man who could talk to you with precision about comets and the movement of the stars.

Translated from the Spanish by H.E. Francis

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Robert Julian

HEIDEGGER AND HITLER

Three or four years ago, a new kind of graffiti appeared in the streets of Paris. Unlike the American-style inscriptions of names which have lately found a home in the subway, or the stencilled images on the sides of buildings and monuments of "mythy" figures such as Rimbaud and Baudelaire, this graffiti could not be associated directly with young people. Unlike the racist slogans which amount to free advertising for the ultra-right movement of Jean-Marie Le Pen, it could not be connected with a political position. It could not even be attributed, for certain, to the French. This graffiti appeared on the plaques which commemorate soldiers who fell during the liberation of Paris in 1944, or members of the Resistance, or victims of the deportation. It generally consisted of two words, a nuance. Where the plaques read "shot (or deported) by the Germans," they were changed to read "by the Nazis." It was a way of marking the passage of time.

Change is less visibly in the air when it comes to philosophy, though there is considerable stir of late over a book which purports to make decisive revelations about the Nazi involvement of Martin Heidegger. *Heidegger et le nazisme* (Paris: Verdier) by a Chilean author, Victor Farias, has burst upon the French intellectual scene, causing a tumult which only a few months ago would have been difficult to imagine. In so doing, it has brought to a close the celebration of the long-awaited "official" translation of Heidegger's major work *Being and Time* (1927),* which replaced abridged versions of the work and a controversial, pirated edition available since 1985. If the French have waited over fifty years for their complete translation, the delay seemed to confer one advantage: in 1986 it could also crown the author, whose influence in France has never been so powerful, as the supreme thinker of this century. Since World War II, Heidegger has exerted more influence in France than anywhere else, including Germany. Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Lacan, Blanchôt, and Char, not to mention Beaufret, have all helped to "prepare" for his current institutional importance with figures such as Lévinas and

**Etre et temps,* translated by François Vezin (Paris: Gallimard, 1986).

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Derrida. Farias's would-be indictment has disrupted the coronation; voices are being raised on all sides, and the last strains of this intellectual hymn ring with a sinister undertone.

As sociology, psychoanalysis, and structuralism decline, philosophy is again coming into its own in France. One proof is that the controversy over Heidegger has found its way into every branch of French cultural life. Not only scholarly magazines but even the daily newspapers have given the debate regular coverage, and discussions among experts are being waged on radio and television. Journalists, writers, and scholars are all taking part. The intensity of the debate (now in its ninth month), as well as the stagy, inbred character of Parisian intellectual life, has prompted Jacques Derrida to describe these media events with an expression much in vogue: in an interview discussing the question, he described their usage as typically "Franco-French." His phrase also refers to the fact that a great deal, some say the lion's share, of Farias's findings have been reported and recognized in Germany for many years. The same linguistic and mental barriers which explain the overdue literary event may also be at work in the sudden realization that serious flaws remain in our understanding of Heidegger's development.

Writing in a French weekly, German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer was positively at a loss to understand. "The uproar caused by this book is astounding. Was so little known about the Third Reich?" The resonance of that question explains his position better than any of his other remarks that the book is already "far out of date" (and that its problems are more than a matter of *facts*). Gadamer's bewilderment is typical of many earlier treatments of the question of Heidegger's 1933 engagement as Rector of the University of Freiburg and his simultaneous enrollment in the Nazi Party. Hannah Arendt, writing in 1969 to honor the philosopher's eightieth birthday, addresses the political question in a footnote near the end of her essay. "This escapade which today—now that the bitterness has subsided and, especially, now that justice has to some extent been done regarding the innumerable pieces of false evidence—is referred to most often as [H.'s] error, this escapade has many different aspects. . . . " The rest of the long footnote is of the same tenor: it does not so much hedge as waver, and perhaps even insinuate that now that the dust has settled . . . things may not be so clear. Or take Jean Beaufret, Heidegger's long-standing disciple and the orthodox conduit of his thought in postwar France. In 1984 he replied to a questioner, "Heidegger never did anything which could moti-

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vate the allegations made against him. [The political analysis of his thought derives from] the conspiracy of mediocre minds working in the name of mediocrity." This might be paraphrased: Heidegger is not only innocent (of what he is accused of) but also above being innocent. The disciple doth protest too much.

The French debate in its current form falls prey to the same difficulties. Even the pitched camps of apologists and critics fall into the regular pattern of what Freud called "negation": their gestures to resolve the question once and for all seem inevitably to open it again, launching them into a vicious circle of negations, false triumphs, and false defenses. Derrida, who is by temperament hardly given to insults, has speculated as to whether Farias "has read Heidegger for more than one hour." Unfortunately, one begins to wonder if the remark should not apply to the entire (and very learned) company. No one seems to have read Heidegger enough to make headway on the issue (and what would making headway mean?). No one has learned from the tireless repetition of charges and acquittals concerning Heidegger how to move on such precarious ground. One might ascribe this problem as well to the "Franco-French" limits of the debate, except that the present difficulties have echoes elsewhere. Without mentioning cases like Waldheim's, one has the choice of revisionist movements afoot in Germany (to explain the Holocaust in terms of German fear of the Russians or of a Jewish uprising) and France (where some would deny that the Holocaust occurred at all—and it has recently come out that Beaufret had sympathy for this position). There are also the recent revelations of Nazi involvement of the late Yale University Professor Paul de Man, one of the leading theorists of deconstruction in America, to suggest that the French debate is, in fact, a local skirmish in a much wider conflict.

Farias's book represents years of patience. He has sifted through public archives in Berlin and elsewhere, but it is not exactly a history of Heidegger's activity during the Nazi period. Farias has a *theory*. Far from having taken leave of the Nazi movement when he resigned from his position as Rector in 1934, Heidegger remained active (and a member of the Party) until 1945. His distance from the official line of the NSDAP did not make him an outcast (as he claimed) but only a disappointed supporter: first the "revolution" had not gone fast enough, and then it went astray. Farias interprets this position as one of affinity with the S.A. faction led by Ernst Roehm who was "eliminated" in favor of Rudolf Hess during the

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Night of the Long Knives in 1934. Heidegger, with similarly radical aspirations, who saw in the Nazi movement the "possibility" for Germany to be "born to itself," would have been outdistanced by Rosenberg and Krieck as the Party philosophers, and by the movement itself which took a different turn.

This theory is plausible, even probable, just as the documents which Farias reproduces offer a revolting image of Heidegger taking an active part and striving to secure his ends by denunciations, betrayals, and a few racial slurs. But Farias's account leaves one uncomfortable for other reasons as well. The thrust of the work is deeply polemical, even inquisitorial. Not content to show that Heidegger wished to play a larger part in the movement but was prevented from doing so, Farias erases the distinction (the book's thesis!) altogether in order to argue that he was nothing less than exemplary, the archetypal Nazi. Farias offers conjectures as well regarding Heidegger's youth, attempting to show that anti-Semitic (and Nazi) positions characterize him from the start and down to the very end. The case will not bother readers for being slightly overschematic; it admits of no ambiguity whatsoever.

And yet there is something embarrassed about this full-scale attack. Denouncing Heidegger's denunciations, Farias makes his case so airtight that it shows its limits everywhere. The scholarship in many instances is partial or inexplicably shoddy. Quotations are excerpted in order to say only what they contain in the way of condemnation. Arbitrary associations of ideas take the place of causal arguments whenever they serve to incriminate. Farias's "revelations" promise us, at long last, the truth on Heidegger's activity—except that the bulk of his supposedly original information has been available for a long time across the Rhine (and to interested readers in France), and it is not the magic formula proving Heidegger's guilt.

At best, as another participant in the debate has said, the book "furnishes bad arguments for a real debate." There are increasingly good reasons for looking critically at Heidegger's career: his positions on technology, democracy, "high" culture, and urban life (to name only these) amount to massive refusals, statements of a tension with the modern world as great as two continents rubbing together. But at worst, Farias's disquiet is spread evenly across the board, making this media event no better orchestrated, no more cogent, than the debates which have concerned a narrower audience in the past. Some of the more journalistic advocates of a harsh stance savor

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a little too visibly the scandal which has clouded the intellectual scene, using the occasion to remark that philosophers are no different from anyone else (Heidegger has been compared to Le Pen) or that they are worse (he is a "little man"). Among the more professional critics, the most outspoken have that mixture of outrage and satisfaction which Nietzsche associated with the rise of morals and which he derided as a reflex of weakness. The flurry of conscience against Heidegger seems designed in large part to gain ground against Heideggerians, to profit from the confusion to advance a different model of philosophy. Here, too, this vehement good faith will have to explain why only now the bandwagon has swung into view.

The defenders are not above the same kind of devotion and the same temptation to take easy shelter. "The decisive question before us is this: was there, yes or no, an essential dependence between Heidegger's philosophy and his National-Socialist adhesion?" asks one professor whose accusations that Farias's book reads like a "speech for the prosecution" are compromised by that "yes or no." Vacillating between the philosopher's thought and his acts in search of the *one* decisive question, his defenders prove as embarrassed as the critics. Invariably they seem dishonest in trying to balance out the historical record, that is, to recall that in place of a candidate whom, in 1933, he would denounce to a professors' group in the Party at Göttingen as a "bad National-Socialist," he named a Jew as his teaching assistant in 1931. Invariably they lack the proper terms to defend his thought. The most inflated (and uneasy) defense along these lines comes from one "Heideggerean" who concludes, "In my opinion, Heidegger amply justified his existence by his work"—as if the standpoint of church eternity would solve everything.

Those who concentrate on the philosopher to the exclusion of the political actor fare no better. Gadamer's position is seemlier than the ones just cited, but no less problematic. The high point of his article is reached when he asks if Heidegger "felt responsible for the terrible consequences of Hitler's coming to power, for the new barbarity, the Nüremberg laws, the terror, the bloodshed and, in the end, the indelible shame of the death camps? There is only one answer: No." But as the rhetorical buildup suggests, there is no *philosophical* reason to think that this is the right form for the (moral) question, or that the answer pinpoints Heidegger's essential flaw. Or should the word be shortcoming or blindness or error or failure or misdeed? Arendt, in her essay of 1969, is sensitive to this problem, although she narrowly averts a stumbling block of the same kind:

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after crediting Heidegger with being the first to give some understanding of the nature of Nazism (its relation to planetary technique, etc.), she blames him for having never read *Mein Kampf*. (This point also had been made by Eric Weil in 1948.) This "error," which can almost be viewed in his favor, is nonetheless damaging for a responsible intellectual. Yet Arendt forgets that such cases may well have been typical of the period and that Benjamin, who is certainly one of the outstanding examples of a modern intellectual, embraced Marxism without having read more than scraps of Marx.

It is one more irony of the present debate that, to defend Heidegger, his apologists can respond to a question like Gadamer's by saying: yes, but he *knew*. No thinker in this century, except perhaps Benjamin, has so clearly foreseen the emergence of a new barbarity and worse—which he associated with the preponderance of technique and the closing era of metaphysics. And it is probably true that he expressed his responsibility, and was one of the first to do so, by knowing. Yet even this knowledge and the warning it contains could not prevent him from taking the wrong side, at least for a time. (And critics who accent his extreme and overt reservations concerning democracy may suspect that, for Heidegger even after the war, there was no right side.) This is one more imperious sign that he does not deserve to be defended as much as thought-out.

The images of the man's involvement run from the hapless scholar thrown into the political maelstrom or carried away in a moment of "pathos" to the convinced, Machiavellian activist or the lifelong proponent. But the living danger of Heidegger's case will never simply depend on our view of his conduct in 1933–34 or even in the years following. Heidegger made visible attempts to come to terms with Nazism as of 1935, with the *Introduction to Metaphysics* and in subsequent years with his work on Nietzsche and Schelling. These works represent the first massive evidence of the "Kehre," the turn in his thought away from the fundamental ontology of *Being and Time*. This is the moment in which he asserted the urgent need for "thought" to undertake the dismantling of Western metaphysics ("philosophy"). To take the measure of these changes, to see in what way they form a response to that culmination of philosophy which, for Heidegger, was the Nazi movement: these are subjects beyond the scope of a media debate which, in the name of a consensus, risks leaving the old categories intact. (The recent book by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *La fiction du politique,* has not curtailed the debate, but his discussion of Heidegger and Nazism has greater

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breadth and suggestiveness than many other contributions.) And it is likewise a question, one more question, whether such an approach truly closes the door to the new barbarity or whether "thought" too has been lastingly compromised, cured of its desire for foundations or never so in need of them. It is a question which can be asked of most disciplines in our day.

For one of Heidegger's most forceful critics, T. W. Adorno, that compromise is synonymous with the name "Auschwitz"—a name which Heidegger never pronounced. It is hardly an item for the newspapers that through the entire postwar period Heidegger kept a deliberate, awful silence in regard to the death camps. Yet there is no "fact" in the archives that is as troubling and patent. Scholars have learned of a single counterexample, published in Germany in 1984, apparently unknown in France until Lacoue-Labarthe (and not Farias) recently brought it to public attention. In an unpublished lecture of 1948, Heidegger alluded to the death camps in a catalogue of examples of the hegemony of technique in our day: "Agriculture has become an automated food industry," the same in essence as "the fabrication of corpses in the gas chambers, the blockade and starvation of whole regions, the hydrogen bomb," summarily, in that order. Whatever the justice of the grouping and the argument behind it, the reticence of these words confirms the rule of silence. And what is appalling about them cannot, even in Heidegger's terms, be only technological.

To the irony of his *knowing* long in advance, and with the expression he gave to that understanding in the works of the 1930s, 1940s, and afterward, there is an answering and unbearable irony in his never giving voice to the unspeakable horror of the camps. Called upon a number of times to address the subject, Heidegger obstinately refused—as if speech would in itself have comprised some kind of retraction or avowal, or as if words like Auschwitz and Dachau were not part of *his* German language. Perhaps they had never been; perhaps, too, such purity has nothing salutary about it. In any case, his refusal is embedded in his times which he viewed as the postmodernity (the "midst") of nihilism.

Much of the present debate is aimed at sounding out a silence which is, finally, more the man's than the work's. The results, not surprisingly, are meager; each view reduces to a single theme. Apart from those who ascribe it to outright anti-Semitism (which he seems more courageously than most to have refused), it has been taken by some critics to imply that he never truly renounced his engagement

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of 1933, in spite of explicit statements to the contrary. To others, his only "thought" was for the destiny of the Germans, and that could not mean the German Jews. Even some of Heidegger's staunchest defenders are ill at ease here, and their rebuttals again take the form of a negation: he was not a Nazi, though he should have renounced it (again). But a more mollifying and potentially dangerous fringe of his defenders has found in his silence the "merit" of exculpating the German identity and of placing the Holocaust in perspective. Such a position makes it possible to measure Heidegger against the decade. Where they refuse the singularity of mass extermination on the grounds that it has become a "dogmatic" fixation (the word is Beaufret's, from a letter expressing sympathy for the French revisionist position) and seek to fit it into the perspective of a war, Heidegger's thought is one of the best suited to warn of the emptiness and dangers of such historicism.

Sartre's famous statement that Marxism is "the insuperable horizon of our time" has aged badly. If the description was right, then we have witnessed more than a sunset, something like a fracturing of the horizon. Fragments of it remain. The mobilization of intellectuals *en masse* to pronounce on the Heidegger affair owes more to a sense of intellectual duty than to a Heideggerian injunction to thought. Céline, for example, has greater notoriety in France, but his political errors could never have prompted the entire class of intellectuals to take up their pens. The lashing out, on all sides, against the media's role in the present debate no doubt forms part of that duty, but it is also a sign of torment. Almost every *j'accuse* pronounced in this debate has ended up being a self-accusation as well, performed on the public stage. For this debate has to do with more than the past. It suggests that because a war was won and infamy revealed does not mean that we have gone beyond the impasse (in thinking, in society) which precipitated the crisis. In the same way, it is fairly certain that if Heidegger, in the words of one defender, had fully "removed the earth from around the roots of Nazism," he would not be the prize of the intellectual contest which he is today. That is why an excellent piece of bravura and *gaya scienza* from the sociologist Jean Baudrillard is, finally, not to the point. Our problem, he says, is that we no longer have the strength to forget. One feels that this debate *will* be forgotten, but no one knows yet with what result.

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George Jochnowitz

MARX AND ISLAM

Before I lived in China, I was opposed to Marxism because I considered its doctrine a cruel one. After spending an enjoyable semester teaching at Hebei University, I was not only opposed to Marxism—I hated it, not because of its cruelty but because it is irrational.

The political institutions of the Western world were formed by the thought of the Enlightenment, the Age of Reason. Obviously, reason was not invented in the eighteenth century; what makes that period significant in history is that thanks to it, reason became a political issue. The idea of political freedom was a logical outgrowth of a belief in reason, since the thought inherent in reason depends on the freedom to think.

Karl Marx did not consider himself a mystic, and the philosophy he created was committed to rationality. Yet Marxism has a definite mystical component. Marxists believe that capitalism is doomed to disappear, though the evidence to support such a belief is wanting. Stranger still, they believe the state will wither away, although few states were ever less likely to than the communist regimes. They even believe that alienated labor and conflict will come to an end once communism is achieved. If that is not mysticism, what is? Marxism has of course evolved. It has been modified by Leninism—and by the power it has accumulated. What began as a system concerned with achieving equality and a classless society has developed into a doctrine concerned with maintaining and extending its influence. Its goal is orthodoxy.

Today, there are probably only two systems of belief for which people kill: Islam and Marxism. Northern Ireland of course comes to mind, but the "troubles" there are of a national rather than a religious nature, with the nationalities defined by religious affiliation. In the twentieth century, killing for one's nation is acceptable; killing for one's belief is restricted to the second and third worlds. No one in Northern Ireland is planting bombs because they are arguing for the truth of transubstantiation. The citizens of Ulster, like the Lebanese Christians and, to a great extent, the Lebanese Moslems, are fighting for the control of their country, not to propagate their faith.

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Furthermore, Islam and Marxism are the only doctrines that have absolute power. It is true that there are countries, such as Israel and the Republic of Ireland, where a dominant religion is powerful, but it is only in certain (not all) Marxist and Islamic states that the official faith can never be challenged. It is hard to find a believer in Judaism so fervent that he advocates stoning for adultery, or a Catholic so devout that he believes in a revival of burning at the stake. But there are Islamic and Marxist countries where both adultery and heterodoxy are punishable and, on occasion, capital offenses.

Moslems and Communists have been waging a bloody war in Afghanistan for several years. Islamic states have jailed Marxists; Communist countries have persecuted Moslems. Nevertheless, there exists in the world an implicit Marxist-Islamic alliance. It is most apparent in votes at the United Nations and in acquiescence or complicity in international terrorism. But leftist writers and intellectuals are blind to the excesses of Islamic regimes.

Marxism and Islam are strong for a variety of reasons. Each has a complex system of analysis, supported by a strong intellectual tradition, which can treat every aspect of human life. To the educated, these philosophies offer a framework; to the simple, they offer the security of always knowing what is right and wrong. These positive strengths are supported by a great fear, the fear of a phenomenon perceived as evil: personal freedom, especially sexual freedom, and most particularly pornography, prostitution, and homosexuality. In addition to this fear, there is an obsession—an inordinate concern with an issue that should not merit very much attention: Zionism.

Few societies ever have tolerated free sex, because they must provide for the rearing of the next generation. In most communities throughout the world this has meant that fathers take responsibility for their offspring—a responsibility much more easily evaded when it is unclear who has fathered whom. Perhaps it makes biological sense for the human species to place social limits on biologically determined sexual desires. Yet a great number of philosophical and religious traditions have defined sexual freedom outside of clearly specified family situations as sin. On the other hand, members of the highest (and occasionally, the lowest) classes are not completely bound by sexual taboos. Men are frequently allowed more sexual freedom than women, probably because men cannot give birth.

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In the industrialized West, these restrictions began to break down even before the widespread availability of contraception. In the late 1960s, a sexual revolution took place in the United States and in much of Europe, clearly because the risk of unwanted pregnancy had become greatly reduced. In addition, sexual freedom, accompanied by easy access to contraceptives, helped to control population growth: unmarried couples are unlikely to have children. (Pregnancies among teenagers and the underclass are increasing, but in a certain sense, these are people living outside of the industrialized West.) Homosexual acts do not produce children. In a modern society in which population growth is not desirable, sexual freedom may be socially useful.

In a religious world, sin is sin, and few people associate sexual freedom with population control. Therefore, fundamentalist nations must look upon sexual freedom as evil. Yet the West is not only sexually free, but also rich and powerful. Its movies spread its values everywhere, and its comforts are tempting. Khomeini thinks of the United States as the Great Satan. The wealth of American society and the promise of pleasure offered by American personal freedom threaten to undermine one of the most central religious prohibitions.

It is much harder to understand why communism is opposed to sex. Leftists in noncommunist countries are likely to be much more sexually liberated than their apolitical compatriots. The Soviet Union went through a brief period of encouraging sexual freedom, but no longer does. In China, puritanism is strong. To a certain extent this is true because of traditional Chinese values, but it is the consequence of Marxist suspiciousness of personal freedom.

China is desperately concerned about the size of its population. It has embarked on a one-child policy. No one in China is aware that there is a connection between the sexual liberation of the West and its relatively low rate of population increase. Even if the awareness were there, it would not make any difference, since China is a determinedly antisexual society. Although Chairman Mao is dead and the Cultural Revolution has ended, China still has not fully accepted the idea that people should do as they wish.

I lived in Baoding, Hebei Province, China, for five months in 1984. I expected people to tell me that America has no freedom, that our elections are rigged, our thoughts controlled by propaganda, and our liberties meaningless. I had heard such statements back home, from Americans and from foreign students. But to my sur-

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prise, no one in China ever suggested to me that Americans are not free. Some envied our liberty or even said they wanted it for themselves. But the more common attitude was that China was better than the United States because America was being destroyed by the perniciousness and emptiness of freedom—an expression of our acquisitiveness that had led to crime, the disintegration of the family, and a society in which friendships are based on economics.

The essence of this negative view of freedom was that in America sex was rampant. I was asked (with a certain amount of hesitation and apology, since no one wanted to embarrass me) whether it is true that pornography was allowed. I acknowledged that it was. I was also asked whether there was homosexuality. When I suggested that homosexuality was a practice that should be permitted in a country that was trying so hard to keep its population down, no one could understand how I could possibly think of something so outlandish. I was told that China had no homosexuality and never would have any in the future. Why, then, I wondered, was it necessary to outlaw it? It was hard to explain that in the United States families do exist and that most people have little contact with pornography. When I suggested that China might be more prosperous if people were free to choose their jobs or express their political opinions, I usually was told that Chinese society would disintegrate if freedom were tolerated.

The student demonstration that began in Hebei on December 9, 1986, and spread to Shanghai, Beijing, and elsewhere show that there are many Chinese who long for freedom and democracy. Nevertheless, there are others who fear freedom of speech. They are willing to grant that abuses and cruelty are more likely to continue in a state where dissent is not permitted, but their fear of pornography is great, and they feel political repression is a price worth paying in order to prevent it. Yet if sexual freedom existed in China, behavior would hardly change. There are thousands of students from mainland China in America, for instance, who do not spend their time indulging in orgies. No one forces them to enter porno shops. There is no reason to believe things would be different in China. Yet China assumes that if the laws against pornography were repealed, its society would disintegrate.

It is not clear whether China, and communist countries in general, are afraid of freedom because it might lead to sex, or whether they are afraid of sex because it might lead to freedom.

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There are restrictions on personal choice that many people in China find painful: one cannot choose one's place of residence or one's job. Consequently, many married couples are separated, sometimes for decades, when assigned jobs in different cities. This is an extraordinary policy for a nation that prides itself on the stability of its families. Nevertheless, no one protests against this policy, mainly because protest is not allowed, but also because there is no real acceptance of the idea that people have a right to make individual choices, even on so personal a matter as living in the same part of the country as the rest of their family.

Totalitarian countries have always imposed severe and unnecessary restrictions on the liberties of their citizens. In a society in which the philosophy of the country demands that the needs of individuals be subordinated to those of the state, people's rights are taken away in order to exercise and strengthen the state's power to take away rights. When I lived in China, popular support for China's lack of freedom was always expressed to me in terms of fear of sexual liberty and subsequent chaos, despite the fact that Mao's Cultural Revolution has brought China more chaos than any other important country has known since the end of World War Two.

China's opposition to Zionism is quite difficult to explain. It is not deeply felt and seems to be moderating. In October 1984 there were new stories about arms deals between China and Israel. The January 6, 1986, issue of *Near East Report* informs us that China requested that "Israel send it experts in breeding dairy cattle; it also wants Israeli-made irrigation equipment." A headline in the October 2,1987, issue of *China Daily* says, "[Foreign Minister] Wu meets Israeli minister." The fact that the Chinese mentioned this event is as significant as its occurrence. Moreover, both countries have experimented with agricultural communes; both use a woman driving a tractor as a national symbol; in both places it never is necessary to wear a necktie.

Israel recognized the People's Republic of China in January of 1950, a fact that very few Chinese citizens are aware of. In September of 1954, Zhou Enlai addressed the First National People's Congress and said, "Contacts are being made with a view to establishing normal relations between China and Israel." Why does the Chinese government hide this information from its people? Somehow, the question seems silly—everybody knows that Marxism is anti-Zionist. How could a communist society ever concede

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that it shares similarities with Israel, or is buying arms from Israel, or was supported by Israel in the days when its existence was still a debatable issue? We take Marxist opposition to Israel for granted.

Yet there is neither an ideological nor a practical reason for this hostility to exist. Although honest people may honestly disagree about Zionism, no one seriously believes that Israel is a threat to any communist state, nor is it possible to think that Israel may be a danger to Marxist ideology. Despite the accomplishments of its defense forces, its military situation is inherently precarious. Its most controversial policies in recent years, the invasion of Lebanon and the establishment of settlements on the West Bank, are considered by many people to be examples of injustice and violence, but they are minor wrongs indeed when compared to Cambodia's autogenocide, the Iran-Iraq War, China's conquest of Tibet, Indonesia's massacre of ethnic Chinese, or any number of other events of the past few decades. On the other hand, even the most fervent of anti-Zionists will concede that Israel has achieved a remarkable degree of civil liberties for a country that has never been at peace. Nevertheless, Israel is an outcast. Israeli nationalism has been declared racism. The Arab League enforces secondary and tertiary boycotts against Israel. Jews may not enter Saudi Arabia. Malaysia forbids the performance of "Jewish" music. This endless policy of boycott and nonrecognition is officially the policy of most Arab states. It is also the official policy of most Marxist states. Yet countries like Libya, Iraq, or Saudi Arabia have never suggested that they would make peace if Israel did x or y or z. Their opposition to Israel, supported diplomatically by communist states, is one of permanent enmity. Since such a stance excludes the possibility of peace, it is implicitly genocidal.

Anti-Zionism is one of the great hatreds of our time. Why do Marxist nations join in this extremism, or at least pretend to? There doesn't seem to be any reason other than lack of originality, a common failing in countries with no structure for the expression of opposition. Marx's anti-Semitic essay, "Zur Judenfrage," might explain the situation, but few people care about this work and even fewer have read it. No doubt it is useful for the Soviet Union and China to maintain friendly relations with the Islamic world, but these bonds have survived even the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. What seems to have happened is that shortly before the beginning of the Six-Day War, anti-Zionism became an essential part of

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Marxist doctrine and has not been questioned since then. In other words, Marxism is anti-Zionist because it has defined itself as anti-Zionist.

It seems to make much more sense for Islam to be anti-Zionist. After all, Jerusalem, the third holiest city for Moslems, is now in Israel. Yet before the Six-Day War, East Jerusalem, which is where the holy sites are located, was in Jordan. Anti-Zionism was no weaker then than it is now. Even before 1948, when Jerusalem was ruled by Great Britain, anti-British sentiment along Islamic peoples was strong, but it did not have the ferocity of anti-Zionism. The establishment of Israel, of course, created a refugee problem and, ultimately, Palestinian nationalism. These factors are not so much the causes of anti-Zionism as the result of it. The United Nations Partition Plan of 1947 was an attempt to create both a Jewish and an Arab state. The Jews then living in Palestine accepted the idea of a Palestinian Arab state; the Arabs rejected it because of their anti-Zionism.

Most people know that between 1948 and 1967, Jews were not allowed to visit East Jerusalem. Fewer know that during the same period, Israeli Moslems did not have the right to do so either, or that until 1977, Israeli Moslems were forbidden by Saudi Arabia from fulfilling the religious obligation of making the *hajj*. It was more important to the Saudis, the guardians of Islam's holiest places, to deny the existence of Israel than to let fellow Moslems do their religion's bidding. In other words, being anti-Zionist had in effect become a more important part of Islamic law than Islamic law itself.

Although there are logical reasons to explain why Moslems oppose Israel, there really is no way to explain why it has become such a central, overriding issue. The front page of the March 22, 1987, issue of *The New York Times* carried a photograph of Shiites in Beirut carrying a banner that reads,"Israel, the Absolute Evil." This makes no sense whatever, but it is typical.

There are any number of possible solutions to the problems of the Israelis and the Palestinians. But Arabs who attempted to find such solutions, such as President Sadat and King Abdullah, have been assassinated. Yet, it is not in the interest of the Palestinians to remain forever homeless and persecuted, and they could advance their interests with the Israelis, rather than against them. They have not yet done so, because the thought of accepting Israel's existence—a rather obvious fact—is more horrible to them than the thought of

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being attacked and massacred by Jordanians, Lebanese Christians and Shiites, or Syrians.

If anti-Zionism is one of the great hatreds of our time, that is no doubt because it is the child of anti-Semitism, one of the great hatreds of history. Nevertheless, it is neither logical nor practical, and it survives because it is not questioned. If there were freedom of expression in Marxist societies, China could admit to its citizens that it has bought arms from Israel. And if Islamic fundamentalism were weaker, Arabs could dare to wish to live in peace with Israel. Fundamentalism, whether political or religious, places restrictions on thought. It is therefore a denial of the essence of humanity.

Coming in

Partisan Review

- William Phillips on Kafka's Text
- Fiction by Doris Lessing
- Amos Oz on Nazi Power and Jewish Resistance
- Edith Kurzweil on the Holocaust and Primo Levi
- Vassily Aksyonov on *Glasnost*
- Steven Marcus on Ernest Hemingway
- Nathan Glazer on Life in the Bronx
- Raymond Aron: *A Memoir*
- Stanislaw Baranczak: *On Polish History*
- Elisabeth Frank: *Art Chronicle*
- Ralf Dahrendorf: *Totalitarianism Revisited*
- Elizabeth Young-Bruehl on Anna Freud

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Jed Perl

TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

Air travel, which enables us to move from culture to culture in hours rather than days and weeks, may ultimately have the effect of dissolving the very differences that we travel to discover. The central areas of Paris remain a sacred enclave, on certain streets of which one can imagine oneself back in the days of Chardin, or even earlier. And yet the drive in from the airport, through the sort of suburbs Godard used as the setting for the future in his science-fiction movie *Alphaville*, isn't much different from the trip into countless cities in America.

Perhaps the flattening-out of differences between one culture and another is part of the general disappearance of contrast as a principle in social life. The rich and the poor dress more alike than they used to; the city and country dweller share more and more habits; and so forth. The expatriate tourists of Hemingway seem almost impossible today, not because there are no more people with money, but because the reliable waiter, always there with the next glass of wine, and the bank clerk, always there to send the mail on to Cannes, Biarritz, San Sebastian, are now most likely off on vacations of their own. The setting that created a backdrop for a certain kind of privileged life has disappared. Mastercard doesn't replace this; it works against the prerogatives of the leisure class.

Paris first attracted visitors from America who felt how different the life there was from the life back home. Paris was an inexpensive, marvelous place to go. And the French avant-garde embraced foreigners, in particular Americans, because some of these visitors were responding enthusiastically to everything that was new. When Matisse had his school it was said that there were only Scandinavian and American students (among them Max Weber). Sarah Stein took notes, and Matisse trusted her—he brought his own paintings for her to look at. For Americans the attraction of Paris lay in the audacity with which new art sprang from an ancient soil. This fertility is what Gertrude Stein, too often maligned as a critic of art, understood. In her and Leo's and (later) Alice's apartment things

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commingled: old furniture and majolica with the very newest paintings.

In her book about Picasso, Gertrude Stein describes how old-fashioned Montmartre had been when Picasso lived there during his early years in Paris. She says the last time she was on the rue Ravignan the street "still had its old charm, the little square was just as it was the first time I saw it, a carpenter was working in a corner, the children were there, the houses were all almost the same as they had been, the old atelier building where all of them had lived was still standing." She wonders if, since her last visit, the atelier building has been torn down, and continues, "It is normal to build new buildings, but all the same one does not like anything to change and the rue Ravignan of that time was really something, it was the rue Ravignan and it was there that many things that were important in the history of twentieth-century art happened." The timelessness of the old square with the carpenter (who could be the Joseph in the Merode altarpiece) is the backdrop against which the Negro period and the first collages were created. Ironically, the modern world of modern art was invented in a city—Paris—still steeped in the nineteenth century. There is the paradox of several generations fleeing rigid American conventions to an older world, where one could embrace the new and finally feel free.

Henry James's *The Ambassadors*, a novel played out in the dazzling Paris of the Impressionists, contains the classic exposition of the freedom of the past: the old world as a source of the liberating lessons that art can offer to life. Lambert Strether, the bachelor come to Europe to save his fiancée Mrs. Newsome's son Chad, is brought by the American boy who's been living it up in Paris to the house of the great sculptor Gloriani (said to be modelled on Whistler). The setting is the heart of the Faubourg St. Germain: "a small pavilion, clear-faced and sequestered, an effect of polished *parquet*, of fine white panel and spare, sallow gilt, of decoration delicate and rare." The atmosphere is perfect for a revelation—in the garden there are singing birds, and all around "grave *hotêls*" that stand for "a strong, indifferent, persistent order."

Even before Strether meets the sculptor, "he had the sense of names in the air, of ghosts at the windows, of signs and tokens, a whole range of expression all about him, too thick for prompt discrimination." And then there's Gloriani himself—"a face that was like an open letter in a foreign tongue." James is perhaps a bit ironic about the whole thing; the Italian background of the sculptor, who "migrated, in mid-career, to Paris," gives a certain over-rich glow.

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And yet it is in Gloriani's garden that Strether receives "the deepest intellectual sounding to which he had ever been exposed." He wonders what it is that he's feeling. "Was it the most special flare, unequalled, supreme, of the aesthetic torch, lighting that wondrous world for ever, or was it, above all, the long, straight shaft sunk by a personal acuteness that life had seasoned to steel?" James rushes on to describe the other guests; the plot moves along. In the end Strether goes back to America, but the visit, the afternoon—these redound and change his view of life.

One continues to hear, as late as the 1950s, of the revelations Paris can provide. The GIs who arrived in the city at the end of World War II, and the many students who came a few years after, often on the GI Bill, may have been the last to experience something like James's "signs and tokens," his "aesthetic torch." Picasso, after welcoming the GIs, pretty much left Paris for good, but one could still meet Brancusi and Giacometti, and study with Léger, while scraping by on almost nothing. "Peace and Paris in the springtime of our lives!"—that's how the American sculptor Sidney Geist recalls the fifties in the introduction to a 1986 exhibition of "American Artists in Paris" at the tiny Denise Cade Gallery in New York City. Geist's couple of pages are a rush of images:

> The Louvre, the Seine, Notre Dame, Montparnasse, Montmartre, Saint-Germain! The little hotels and *baraques* where we lived and worked. . . . *Existentialisme.* Juliette Greco, Gérard Philipe. Dancing into the dawn on *Quatorze Juillet*, the smell of bread baking. It was all delicious then and is still pungent in memory.

Arriving back in the New York of the 1980s after the plane trip from Paris, the shock of return doesn't take hold until the taxi rolls onto the dark, overburdened streets of Manhattan. The syncopated traffic lights and the hundreds of neon signs are still today something noteworthy, after the relative quiet of central Paris. Zooming by, you can understand what fifty or sixty years ago attracted Léger and Mondrian to New York—you feel anew the bumpy rhythms of the city's nights. Colette, giving a radio talk to American audiences in the months before Paris fell to the Nazis, recalled her visit to New York. "At this moment, America is glittering in that multicolored evening glare I once glimpsed on a short trip to New York, the letters of fire, the arrows, the quivering garlands of the advertisements, the cinemas, the big stores. But here, it is two o'clock in the morning, nighttime, wartime. . . . "

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Between the forties and the sixties, everything changes in New York-Paris relations. Paris comes to the end of a great cycle, and New York grows older and wiser. The American artist begins to regard the Parisian artist as an equal and then an inferior. If Paris still spells romance, certainly there's no more of the American's agonized yearning, his starry-eyed awe. By the sixties everybody is talking about living in a global village. Its art center is New York. Youth travels to discover its newly found internationalism—the way its habits are the same in Berkeley or Paris, how its confrères take to the streets for more or less the same reasons everywhere.

Paris and New York become a very odd couple—the capitals, respectively, of the early twentieth century and the later twentieth century.

> I wish I were reeling around Paris
> instead of reeling around New York
> I wish I weren't reeling at all.

This is the poet Frank O'Hara, a friend to many artists, and he can't seem to make up his mind where he stands in these transatlantic affairs.

In the sixties Fairfield Porter began a series of very beautiful paintings of New York. Porter doesn't see the city in terms of iconic images like Georgia O'Keeffe's skyscraper, Joseph Stella's Brooklyn Bridge. He comes to the subject with a taste for small, delicate shifts of color and scale that's in essence very European—owed to Vuillard and Bonnard. Porter chooses as his subject not the booming public city, but the city of the artists. He paints Astor Place, the hub of the little world where from the thirties through the fifties *Partisan Review* had its offices and the members of the avant-garde rented cold-water lofts along Eighth Street and Tenth Street. He paints Union Square, just above Fourteenth Street, another landmark for the artists, the traditional northern border of the bohemian downtown scene. And he also paints midtown, the section of fancy galleries, of money and success.

In all these canvases Porter catches the open, sprawling character of the city and its high, clear, revelatory light. Though there may be patches of New York where one can find the perfectly composed little square, the street as a theater or a stage that's familiar from Balthus and Hélion, Porter knows this isn't the essence of this city. He avoids the obviously picturesque as unfaithful to New

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York. Still, Porter reveals it to be a comfortable place; he sees New York through the eyes of artists and poets, of O'Hara announcing "How funny you are today New York/like Ginger Rogers in *Swingtime*."

In Porter's work the city emerges out of great big planes and strokes of color—whites infused with gold or blue: peculiar oranges and greens. The city isn't constructed, block by block. It's formed out of the collision of bulky elements and tiny grace notes which are scattered almost at random, here and there. Paris, in Balthus's *Passage* and Hélion's *Triptyque du Dragon,* is a bourgeois capital—perfectly ordered, ordinary; Porter's New York is more like a pioneer outpost—improvised by speculators and con artists.

This is the New York that, in the hagiography of art history, has become the clearinghouse of tradition. *The Triumph of American Painting*, Irving Sandler calls it in the title of his best-selling history. Meanwhile, Paris continues as a living museum, full of extraordinary formulations. We now go to Paris as travelers from Stendhal to Henry James went to Rome. We're enchanted yet critical; we regard the natives as some fascinating endangered species. How wise these foreigners appear—maybe too wise for their own good, too clear on what is possible ever to attempt anything new. And if Paris is no longer a capital to which we go to see new art, this may be because there are today many more studios in New York where Paris is alive than in Paris itself.

To be always the big, brash, hot, young city—this is intolerable. New York—oh, yes, triumphant—must still go to Paris at the end of the twentieth century. Whatever New York may have, it lacks the experience of working through history, of keeping tradition alive. Subtle Paris shows us how to unknot the knots, to find our way out of the one-way streets and cul-de-sacs.

Nowadays, an American artist's judgment of the School of Paris is a judgment on the value of certain kinds of feeling, certain aspects of the past. The looking toward Europe—this is a great risk, one involving a considerable leap of the imagination. Paris, to an American's eyes, will always be different from Paris to a Parisian's eyes. Can we know them, ever? Their revolutions become our traditions. But then they can never know us, either. . . . Léger, in America in the forties, goes into a department store where he sees three clerks standing together, one white, one black, one Oriental. They looked, he writes, like three women out of a painting by Watteau.

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ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS

PALESTINIAN TACTICS, PALESTINIAN GOALS

The unfolding tragedy in the Middle East—in which the Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the Israeli reaction to it are only the latest bloody chapters—is prolonged by the widespread assumption that a conference, or "negotiations," will bring about a solution. Instead, misunderstanding and abuses have characterized the discussions, perceptions, and reactions.

A fault line runs between emotional perceptions and political analysis. The underlying brutality of the situation seems to close off most options other than protracted struggle, a fight to the finish. As Meron Benvenisti remarked, the Israeli right has a sharper, more penetrating insight into the depth of the hostility Palestinians hold against Israel, while the left has the required political solutions. This has confused Israelis, but Americans (including many American Jews) have come completely unglued. Woody Allen, whose previous venture in op-ed writing has been to oppose colorization of black and white films, attacked the Israeli policy as brutal. Abe Rosenthal rushed into the breach, arguing that Israel's defense minister, Yitzhak Rabin, should resign.

For these observers, the problem had become the alleged Israeli brutality. But the problem, insofar as it was with the Israeli leadership, was with the hardline Likud policy which has helped prevent diplomatic movement—with an assist from the cowardice of Arab moderates and the strength of Arab extremism—and not with Rabin's clumsy and heavyhanded approach to putting down the riots. Rabin, after all, supports Shimon Peres's call for an international peace conference, the Shultz initiative, for anything that will help get the peace process off the ground. (I am not convinced by arguments, like the one made by Leon Wieseltier in *The New Republic,* that the Israeli reaction itself will help prevent a politics of peace. In the Middle East, as elsewhere, one must strike a balance between diplomatic flexibility and military strength. And beyond Shamir and Likud, there remains the problem of Palestinian extremism toward Israel.)

So many myths have been exploded by the uprising—the *intifada*, as they call it—that most of us have been left with images whose relation to events have become historical, museum pieces

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made up of equal parts of fact and fancy. As a result of the *intifada*, the Israeli mainstream is beginning to shake off the myth of occupation on the cheap, the possibility of sustaining the occupational status quo for another twenty years until the Arabs come to their senses and sue for peace. When these disturbances peter out, as they finally must, things will not return to the status quo ante of an increasingly cozy and, in the language of Meron Benvenisti, "irreversible" relationship between Israel proper and the territories.

Of course, there is no straight line from this painful awakening to a pragmatic and peace-oriented politics. Israelis have tended to become radicalized in their previously held positions, not converted to a new point of view. Meir Kahane is doing well in the polls. His ideas—including the mass "transfer" of Palestinians out of "Greater Isreal"—are making the circuit of the hawkish parties. The *intifada* has underscored for many Israelis the impossibility of coexistence—on whatever basis—of the two peoples in the land of Israel. There is a growing "there's no room here for the two of us" mentality—and a search for the train leaving town that the Palestinians are supposed to get on.

This may wear off in time, which is why since the riots broke out the Labor party has dropped its call for early elections and set its hopes on an election date as late as is legally possible. When Israel invaded Lebanon in the summer of 1982, most people rallied to the flag. When the war turned to rubble (literally as the headquarters of the Christian Phalange party collapsed on the broken body of President Bashir Jumayel and Palestinians were massacred at Sabra and Shatila) public opinion began to turn against the expanded version of the war. By the summer of 1984, when the present Knesset was elected, the national mood was sour on Lebanon and pro-withdrawal. While this sentiment was not expressed in a shift of votes from the pro-war Likud to the antiwar Labor party, it helped convince Likud to go along with the exit from the mess into which they had gotten the country.

By next November 1st, when Israelis go to the polls, the extended reserve duty and higher taxes they will be paying as a direct consequence of the occupation—or, to be more precise, of Palestinian resistance to the occupation—may result in a similar shift. As Amos Oz told me recently, "If the new Sephardi middle class has to choose between the West Bank and their new secondhand Subaru and more reserve duty, they will choose to keep the Subaru and less reserve duty." But in the meantime, politically moderate insiders see

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black when they think about the upcoming elections. There is no gainsaying the fact that the *intifada* has driven the Jordanian option supported by Shimon Peres and the "right wing of the left" underground—perhaps for good. It is not at all clear that a peace process can circumvent the P.L.O. At the same time, it remains unclear whether the P.L.O. is capable of participating in a peace process.

Palestinians have won a major tactical victory, but they appear incapable of capitalizing on it and transforming it into a strategic diplomatic breakthrough. Palestinians living in the occupied territories have put to rest the myth of their own passivity—we used to wonder what would happen to the much-debated Jewish settlements in the West Bank if Palestinian Arabs would stop building them—as well as the myth of having to rely on forces outside the areas, that is, on the P.L.O. They have had a rather more difficult time letting go of the myth that if they rise up Israel would be forced out of the territories by the power of international public opinion, that is, without major political concessions.

Essentially, the Palestinian tactic could be termed "land-for-nothing." Proposals by P.L.O. chairman Yassir Arafat and others, most recently and regrettably by the Italian socialist leader (and erstwhile friend of Labor leader Shimon Peres) Bettino Craxi, that the United Nations relieve Israel of the responsibility of administering the territories, are not a version of "land for peace." (The Italian proposal was that the UN award the EEC a mandate or trusteeship pending the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.) If Israel surrenders the territories outside the context of peace negotiations, what does it have left to offer the Arab side in negotiations? The only internationally agreed upon recipe for an Arab-Israel peace calls for the trading of land (not all the lands, mind you, but "land") for peace. The riots have been successful from the Palestinian point of view in refocusing the question onto the occupation itself, as a finite universe without roots in history, and away from the even-handed land-for-peace formula (evenhanded since it posits that both sides have something the other legitimately seeks) and from the Palestinian refusal to accept as legitimate a Jewish national state in any part of Palestine. This is meant to—and does—encourage post-colonial Western guilt.

There also has been an attempt to co-opt—no, kidnap—the moral capital Jews derive from the Holocaust. The ill-fated voyage of the Palestinian "Exodus"—which was supposed to sail with a deck-

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full of Palestinian refugees and exiles for the Israeli port of Haifa—was not a begrudging acceptance of the legitimacy of the Jewish "Exodus" carrying with it an implicit recognition of the legitimacy of the Jewish return to the land of Israel. It was a mocking and cynical dismissal of Jewish claims to victimization. (In its rush to embrace the slightest indication of Palestinian moderation, which it defines as anything less fatal than a bomb, *The Nation*, in a front-page editorial, thus misinterpreted the subterranean meaning of the P.L.O. publicity stunt.) If the occupation and the exile are *the* issues, then Palestinians are the victims in this tragedy, Jews the victimizers.

Chaim Weizmann, a great scientist, Zionist leader, and Israel's first president, once said that the Arab-Israel problem was a case of "two rights and two wrongs"—both sides playing the victims and the victimizers. But even thirty-five years later this is not recognized. International observers have been prisoners of the myth that the Israeli presence in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and Palestinian opposition to it can best be understood as part of the unfinished story of decolonization. Much of the American (and, it almost goes without saying, West European) reaction was based on superimposing the colony-rising image on a political reality which resists such comfortable comparisons. For one thing, in their struggle for independence, the Algerians (to use one example) did not threaten or have designs on France as such. Algerian (or Congolese) goals could be met by a simple act of withdrawal by the metropolitan power and the "granting" of independence.

In the case of the Israel-Palestine problem, it has become suddenly, terrifyingly clear that the preferred solution (as far as much of the liberal-left is concerned)—an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip—may not solve the problem, because the problem is not only the Israeli occupation but also Arab hostility to Israel. Even seasoned veterans of the scene on the Israeli left were shocked by the recent publication of hard-line Palestinian views in the newsweekly *Koteret Rashit* (the magazine which commissioned and first published David Grossman's *Yellow Wind*) and of the poem by a "moderate" Palestinian that called for the Jews to leave Palestine—altogether. And the voice of Palestinian moderation, except in certain cases, like that of Hanna Seniora in Jerusalem and Rashid Khalidi in Chicago, remains purposefully ambiguous on the central points. In an interview with Anthony Lewis of *The New York Times*, Yasir Arafat said that "the P.L.O.'s policy is land-for-peace." Even in this attempt at clarifying his stand, the P.L.O. chairman

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had trouble directly answering Lewis's questions: If you get a state, will you agree to live in peace with Israel? He replied, "We need peace more than they do." Well, that could be a yes—I even suppose that it might be—but given the centrality of the issue, one might have hoped for a more forthcoming pronouncement. And it does little to reduce our suspicions about the constraints on Arafat's ability to maneuver on the subject.

In a subsequent *New York Times* Op-Ed piece arguing that a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza would be "democratic, secular, and at peace," Professor Abu Lughod, one of the two Palestinian American members of the Palestine National Council with whom George Shultz recently met, went on to say that Palestinian institutions "offer a vision of a Palestine shared with Israel's Jewish community, *the precise mode of sharing to be freely decided by both peoples*." In other words, even in an article meant to reassure Americans of the peaceful intent of the P.L.O. call for a West Bank/Gaza state, Palestinians cannot say that they will accept a separate post-settlement Jewish state in Israel. "They have a gift for obfuscation," a veteran Israeli diplomat told me the day the Abu-Lughod piece appeared. But one wonders whether such obfuscation is meant to fool Arab hardliners or Western public opinion as to the intent and limits of Palestinian moderation.

At a conference in Boulder, Colorado at the beginning of April, I shared a platform with Hatem Hussaini—once deputy head of the P.L.O. mission to the United Nations. Husseini called for an Israeli withdrawal from the territories immediately in exchange for the relaxation of international pressure against it. (Along the way he asked the audience to join him, Woody Allen, and Allen Ginsberg in opposing Israel.) Husseini most decidedly could not bring himself to say that he would accept a post-settlement, Jewish-dominated State of Israel, of whatever size. He masked his uncompromising anti-Zionism by calling for an end to all nation states, not only the Jewish one.

Arafat's reendorsement of "land-for-peace" was meant to advance the idea of an independent Palestinian state solution. "Peace" advocates of this solution refer to it as the "two state" solution—one for the Jews and other Israelis, and one for the Palestinians. Others call it a "third state" solution, since it would establish a third state in addition to Israel and Jordan in historic Palestine. For this solution to work, Israel must agree to talk to the P.L.O. So in addition to Israeli "brutality" the problem becomes Israel's refusal to negotiate with the P.L.O. (witness many of the advertisements which ap-

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peared in the *Times* and the *Washington Post* during the past few months). But the problem is that the P.L.O. conception of the proposed international peace conference (a view supported, thus far, by the Soviet Union) would have the power to impose a settlement on the region. Given the correlation of forces among the permanent members of the Security Council and the Arab states, Israel and the United States would be badly outgunned. It is merely another version of the UN (or EEC) trusteeship proposal: Israel would be forced out of the territories and would not gain peace.

Palestinians have not given up "the right of return," their claim that their countrymen who left Israel in 1948 must be allowed to return to their homes in Jaffa, Haifa, Ramla, and Lod. But even the most dovish Israeli rejects this claim as counterproductive and historically illegitimate. (For one thing, an equal number of Jews were expelled from Arab lands in the 1948–1955 period. For another, most Palestinians weren't expelled). It is another way Palestinians have of modifying and hedging their acceptance of Israel's right to exist. The militant faction is powerful enough to have prevented Palestinians from taking advantage of occasional possibilities—partition in 1947, Camp David in 1977, the Shultz initiative in 1988—which would have moved the situation toward a compromise settlement.

There are those who explain the failure of the Palestinian leadership—Abba Eban has said that the P.L.O. never misses an opportunity to miss an opportunity—as a series of tactical blunders. In 1977, they feared Camp David autonomy would strangle Palestinian statehood (although the break-away Israeli right rejected Camp David because they thought autonomy would lead directly to a Palestinian state), and in 1988, they rejected the Shultz initiative because it is too Jordanian-oriented and pro-Israeli. But the other possibility, the one that plagues many Israelis, is that the P.L.O. has no Israeli option. Furthermore, the Palestinian state proposal ignores the necessity of considering Jordan in the solution. Jordan may not be Palestine, as the Israeli right disingenuously insists, but it is linked to Palestine by history, economics, and demography. A majority of its population, including the parliament and the King's cabinet, is Palestinian.

If the Israeli right is wrong in insisting that the Palestinians already have a solution in Jordan, the left (and the Arabs) are mistaken in saying that a Palestinian solution can ignore Jordan altogether. A Palestinian solution that ignores the Jordanian connection—which is what the phrase "national self-determination" for the

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Palestinian people has come to mean—ignores a sizable portion of the Palestinian people. A West Bank/Gaza state, even devoid of the sixty thousand or so Jewish settlers, will not have enough space to resettle the Palestinian refugees who will be unable to return to post-settlement Israel. Just as a solution that ignores the Palestinians fails to address a central part of the moral and political calculus, a solution that ignores Jordan runs the serious risk of creating an irredentist (westward toward Israel and eastward toward Jordan) ministate, incapable almost by definition of solving that glaring symbol of Palestinian statelessness, the refugee question. Given the P.L.O.'s tradition of "armed struggle," one may suspect the ability of their political leadership to withstand the maximalist pressures.

Just as we must take a balanced approach to the Jordan/Palestine issue, we should reject the currently fashionable polarized discussion of the occupation. Israeli reaction to the *intifada* has been harsh. But brutality, such as it is, while a constant theme, has not been the only element. As Israel's defenders like to point out, according to almost every index Palestinians in the territories are living better now than they did before Israel began administering their lives in 1967. Economically and educationally, the numbers all point upwards from 1967.

This is not a defense of the occupation; it is merely part of the overall truth. The benign self within the schizophrenic, multiple-identity Israeli occupation has helped raise Palestinian expectations. The humaneness of the occupation, at least in good part, is no answer to the frustrated national quest of the Palestinians. But neither are the Israelis behaving like "Nazis." There is evidence of a slow change in this traditional Arab consensus—the Camp David Accords are one—but the intentional ambiguity in Arab statements of "moderation" are hardly satisfying. Arab leaders seem unprepared—or have a constitutional inability—to talk about normalizing relations with Israel. This is partly the result of a negotiating posture: as long as Israel remains uncommitted to a withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, why should they risk the wrath of Arab rejectionists and recognize Israel? But as time goes on, it appears to be less a tactical feint and more a reflection of the strategic uncertaintly of the Arab position on Israel.

Arab moderation has not been forthright enough to help Israeli moderates advance their cause. Of course, Arab moderates can and do say the same thing in reverse, but in the test case—when Egypt's Sadat broke the taboo against the Jewish state—an Israeli government led by the right was prepared, after much kicking and scream-

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ing, to make a land-for-peace deal. (Employing the same logic, some Likud members defend their own obduracy by masquerading what is really an ideological conviction as a mere negotiating tactic. Why agree to land-for-peace in advance of negotiations, they ask? Rather, let Arabs first recognize Israel and then negotiate. Those Arabs, as it were, in theory willing to recognize Israel, see that recognition as a consequence of a deal, not as a precondition to negotiations. They see Israeli willingness to trade land for peace as the precondition. The Likud, however, does not want to play its cards openly before the game begins, falsely implying that the card is in its deck.

There is, finally, no substance to claims of moral equivalency: the Zionist leadership accepted the 1947 partition of Palestine; Arab states and the Palestinian leadership rejected it. When push comes to shove, this model has held. With both Israel and the United States going to the polls, things are on hold. The *intifada* appears to be waning. An in-depth look at Palestinian tactics and goals is not meant to distract attention from a discussion of what Israel should and should not be doing. Yet those of us who argue for an Israeli initiative cannot do so effectively without understanding the nature of Palestinian politics and aspirations. We do Palestinians no service in failing to take them seriously. And we do Israel no service in asking it to do something, anything, just so long as it acts to defuse the images on our television screens.

David Twersky

MEDIA TACTICS

I had heard so much about an evenhanded policy towards the Mideast that I looked for it in the treatment of the Palestinian demonstrations in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Instead, here are some of the things I found.

In a recent article in *The New York Times Magazine* the vice president of the American Hebrew Congregation stated: "Welcome

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to Israel's Vietnam, Kent State, and Watts rolled into one." Is this a valid comparison to the Israeli dilemma in confronting the Palestinian uprising? After all, America was able to resolve its conflict with Vietnam by withdrawing and alleviated the problems in Watts by opening up the system to its disadvantaged minority. The Palestinian issues, however, cannot be resolved by a unilateral response.

America, which was thousands of miles away from Vietnam, could withdraw without a peace treaty. But Israel cannot. In the words of a young captain whose kibbutz is four miles from Gaza: "I hate this assignment of having to quell the Palestinian uprising. Still, I prefer fighting in Gaza rather than among the houses of my kibbutz." And the inhabitants of Watts wanted to make it in the American system, while the Palestinians do not want to make it in the Israeli one—they want to destroy the state.

At his *Nightline* meetings in Town Hall with Arabs and Israelis, Ted Koppel, at the request of the Arab participants, had erected a fence. The fence clearly conveyed the message: there will be no dialogue. Throughout the program the Israelis tried to talk across this fence, but the Palestinians turned deaf ears. Koppel literally sat on it. For instance, instead of answering a question, one of the Palestinian panel members stated as her demands: "A Palestinian state, a return of the Arab refugees to the heart of Israel." And in response to Jewish children's comments about their need for security, an Arab child demanded that the Israelis "get out of Nablus, out of Jerusalem, and out of Tel Aviv. . . . "

The absence of a dialogue, of course, heightens the dilemma of those Israelis who are ready to look for accommodation and compromise with Palestinian demands. Yet how is a dialogue to begin with a party that refuses to meet and discuss the issues, with a party that dreams of Israel's extinction? Certainly, Koppel's intentions were honorable. But under the pretense of neutrality and even-handedness, television supports the Palestinian dream of portraying Israel as an oppressor and the Palestinians as victims. By identifying with the rebel, television portrays the Arab youths throwing stones and Molotov cocktails as "protesters" to an American public whose emotional response to "protest" always is that it is a positive value. Given that television has no memory of the past, nor responsibility or accountability to the future, commentators only rarely ask why the Israeli army is there, or where the battlefront would be once this army disengages itself.

I recall that Kurt Vonnegut, in *Slaughterhouse-Five,* at great length describes the destructive impact of America's bombardment

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of Düsseldorf during World War II. Imagine a nightly report of the destruction, along with a loss of the true records and the story of that war. Under these circumstances the story that would have to be reconstructed would cast America as the villain and Germany as the victim. Such an impact, however, is achieved by the nightly coverage of the Palestinian uprising in the "occupied areas."

Since Israel has been the scapegoat for the United Nations, the Russian bloc, and the Third World for several decades, the recent coverage by television, perhaps unwittingly, has been legitimizing the Arab cause, and thereby also has fueled their dream of destroying Israel.

My point is not that Israel is beyond reproach on specific issues, nor that criticism by American Jews should not be stated publicly. Political debate and criticism of their government is an Israeli national pastime. But I want to point out that whether or not the conflict will be resolved peacefully is mainly up to the Palestinians rather than the Israelis.

I recall that the day Sadat came to Jerusalem all Israelis were glued to their television sets, with tears in their eyes and excitement in their voices. There was *hope* . . . . When Sadat wanted to talk of peace he was accommodated. And when King Hussein stopped terrorist infiltration from Jordan, the border with his country became peaceful. Even though there is no formal accord with Jordan, Israel accommodated a *de facto* peace. I am certain that as soon as the Palestinians give up their love of hate and riots and look for peace, Israel again will be accommodating. But sensationalist American media coverage only fans these flames.

Abraham Shumsky

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Dominique Schnapper

LETTER FROM PARIS

The reelection of François Mitterrand was assured by the results of the first round of the presidential elections. The only uncertainties had to do with the size of his victory. During the minutes that preceded the official announcement, a group of family and friends assembled around our television were forecasting the results: the most pessimistic among us predicted between 59% and 60%; all the other opinions were between 53% and 55%; the President received 54.5% of the votes.

François Mitterrand, who in 1981 was elected on the strength of his common program with the communists, in 1981 and 1982 abandoned himself to the delusions of a mythical French left—symbolized by its references to Jaurès and Blum and the visit to the Pantheon: nationalizations of large enterprises, rent control, property taxes, efforts to abolish private schooling in the name of nondenominationalism. François Mitterrand was the first one since 1947 to take communist deputies into his government: in 1988 he won as the centrist candidate—a situation of which successively Giscard d'Estaing, Barre, and Chirac had dreamed. The President, who had reached the lowest level of popularity of any president ever in office, also is the first President of the Fifth Republic to receive a second mandate. What's more, his score constitutes nearly a record: only Pompidou, in 1969, faced by the weak and moderate Poher, and De Gaulle, in 1965, at the moment of his glory, did better.

Behind this political achievement hides a revolution of the French political landscape that cannot fail to raise some questions or some unease. The result of the first round brought a real shock. Let us recall the essential numbers: Mitterand, 34%; Chirac, 20%; Barre, 16.5%; Le Pen, 14.5; Lajoinie (PFC), 6%; the other left parties, 9%. In other words, the entire moderate or "governmental" right barely received more than Mitterrand alone. And he automatically brought with him the majority of the left votes and, thanks to his centrist position, could not help but receive some of Barre's and Le Pen's votes. The traditional division among the French right, the objective differences among the three electorates of Barre, Chirac, and Le Pen, prevented the transfer of these votes to Chirac. Thus the ultimate success was certain from the results of the first round.

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The massive fact that will ring like a clarion call was the number of votes received by Jean-Marie Le Pen, the candidate of the nationalist and xenophobic right. The polls, so remarkable in France, had noted his gains, but they had been wrong about the size of the movement. French law does not permit the publication of the results of polls during the week preceding elections. The polls thus are known to the political administrators and to journalists. During the last week of the campaign they revealed the progress of the National Front candidate. But it seems that certain voters, reluctant to declare their vote for the extreme right, preferred to say that they would vote for Chirac (the same was true for the communist vote during the 1950s). From this comes the underestimation of the vote for Le Pen and its thunderous effect.

The effect was even stronger because the intellectuals for some time had been under the illusion that French political life, from the socialist party to the R.P.R., had reached a certain consensus about democratic values: rejection of communism; reticence about all ideologies; renewed adhesion to the values of human rights; a pragmatic and open attitude to economic life and to foreigners. The Commission de la Nationalité, in a report to the first minister, had managed to bring together personalities of different sensibilities and, after six months of work, had agreed on the principles defining a reasonable attitude towards immigrants and their French-born children. This seemed to many a symbolic consensus—established around common values of democracy and of pragmatism. The dream of a pacified democracy, where a socialist party devoid of its obsolete ideologies and a moderate right open to social progress seemed attainable, was achieved. The intellectuals had licked ethnocentrism. But the consensus between *Commentaire* and *Le débat* was not even echoed in the electorate. The weakening of ideology inside the parties left a large void for a certain primitive but strong ideology, on a part of the electorate that could express its disenchantment or its indignation. The dream of the pacified democracy was shattered—to the great benefit of the Candidate-President of the Republic.

Where do Le Pen's voters come from? First we must realize that he has managed to stabilize his electorate: 90% of those who voted for him in 1986 again voted for him in 1988—proof that this was not a sudden change of heart. Among them, 49% came from the right; 33% had not voted before, either because they were too young, or because they had abstained; 18% declared that they had voted left. If one examines their social origins, one notes that Le

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Pen's votes came from all categories. But two groups are over-represented: on the one hand, the "*poujadiste*" types (small artisans and dealers who in 1956 voted for Pierre Poujade) who were uneasy about modernization and the opening up of the European market and manifested their anxiety in the form of this vote of protest; on the other hand, the young unemployed, without degrees or qualifications and unable to get first jobs, who looked for symbolic integration by excluding others. This double *poujadiste* current shows that the phenomenon of Le Pen is linked to deep changes in French society. Economic modernization, to which the socialists, a bit constrained, had rallied, created groups of people incapable of entering an ever more exigent job market in a time of crisis. And the Communist Party and its associated organizations, whose role as social stabilizer had been considerable, no longer assures the control and the integration of alienated groups. The church organizations also no longer play their traditional role in social integration. This young and badly integrated population, which lives in the "jails" of the suburbs of French cities, had massively voted for the candidate of the extreme right. The workers of the right (approximately a third of all workers), who for a long time had voted for the Gaullists, voted for Le Pen. The presence of the immigrants and the inevitable problems they posed, by bringing their numbers and different cultures to the local population, gave the primitive themes of the National Front an apparent justification—reanimating the vigor of the xenophobic political right which always has existed in France but has been deprived of political expression since the Second World War.

In the course of Mitterrand's tenure, the 25% of protest votes the French electorate always scores has moved from the extreme left (the P.C.F. still had 18% of its voters in 1981) to the extreme right. Mitterrand's politics have contributed actively to the destruction of the Communist Party. He certainly was helped by the Stalinist character of the party; the gap between economic and social realities; the wooden language its functionaries held on to; the deterioration of the image of the communist countries; the decline of large, heavy industry on which the party and the C.G.T. have a hold. But this situation, for which one gladly gives some credit to the President, resulted in the birth of the extreme right as the new political opposition. On the social level, the extreme right will not be able for a long time to bring about the same control and the same integration of the lower classes as the communist machine.

Politically, the effect of its presence is to deter the political right

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from expressing its politics and to allow Mitterrand, for an unforseeable period, to profit from the situation the Communist Party secured for the right from 1947 to 1981. As André Malraux said: "Between us and the communists there is nothing." That is what allowed the Gaullists to retain power. Mitterrand today can say in the same way: "Between Le Pen and us, there is nothing." He can at will provoke a dissolution of the government, reelect a socialist assembly with a majority of four hundred deputies, and then govern with the socialist party alone. He can, according to the custom, "make an opening to the center," that is to say, retain the actual National Assembly and receive a majority with the help of a few centrists who are worried by the growth of the National Front. Since the announcement of the results, one has seen on television the division of the different groups, and even the different personalities, of the former majority—the ones careful to attack Le Penism and to associate themselves with their new president, the others affirming their opposition. The U.D.F., the electoral assembly, no longer exists, and the dramatic collapse of Chirac puts even the leadership of the R.P.R. into question.

For the moment, with the help of Le Pen (to whose party's existence Mitterrand has efficaciously contributed by establishing proportional representation in 1986), the new President of the Republic is the master of the political game. Will he reconstitute a moderate right and finally give France the alternating government of great democracies—of which the intellectuals still were dreaming a few months ago? Or will he, for an unforseeable time, assure the domination by the socialist party, with the help of a few centrists? One hardly knows of any political men who have held the future of democracy above their personal interest. On the day after the election, the liberals, in the European sense of the term, who are between the two victors, Mitterrand and Le Pen, were not happy.

Translated from the French by Edith Kurzweil

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Raymond Carney

CRANE AND EAKINS

Michael Fried's recent study *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration. On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane* (University of Chicago Press) takes as its starting point a recognition of the inadequacy of two of the principal ways art critics have approached nineteenth-century American painting in the past: on the one hand, in terms of genres, and, on the other, under the rubric of "realism." As Fried is aware, American art has been inadvertently patronized (first by foreign critics, subsequently by our own native commentators) by these approaches insofar as they are what he calls strategies of "normalization." They are ways of neutralizing the potential imaginative eccentricities or disturbances of individual works.

The problem with genre study as it is usually carried on is twofold: In the first place, it almost always implicitly cordons off a work in the never-never land of merely artistic connections and statements and thus marginalizes it. In the second place, and more importantly, in establishing a series of archetypal antecedents and contexts for a particular piece, genre studies inevitably minimize the imaginative intensity and individuality of the individual artist's expression in the work (by incorporating the piece into a larger, preestablished tradition of expression in which it is said to participate). In this sense, genre study is a strategy of containment and control, a way of exorcising potentially disturbing spirits.

For example, to take one of the most ubiquitous categories in American criticism, to call a painting (or a novel or a film, for that matter) a "romance," and then to proceed to associate it with a particular tradition of "American romantic" expression is, first, automatically to remove it to a certain distance from life and expression as they exist outside of the work of art; and, second, implicitly to discount any expressive eccentricities or intensities within it. The expressive wildnesses in Hawthorne, Cole, and Capra can all be controlled with this strategy. Anything especially eccentric, intense, or threatening about a particular work can be explained away as being a function of the form. The expressive audacity or extremity one encounters in it can be shifted away from the personal predicament of the artist and attributed to the expressive demands of the genre.

Although they may seem to be alternatives to genre ghettoizing, conventionally "realistic" narrative, biographical, or ideologi-

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cal accounts of a work's meaning are equally repressive of the energies it may attempt to release. Fried argues that the assumptions that define American realism as a critical doctrine are, in effect, only variations on the genre patronization of a work. "Reality" as critics describe it in American paintings, novels, and films is, after all, only one more set of normalizing, stabilizing, or distancing conventions by which—rather than allowing a work to assault or wound us—we contain its expressive threat. The doctrine of "American realism" (like that of "American romanticism") is a way of hiding from ourselves the strangeness or intensity of the work of our greatest artists. That is because—like genre categorization—realism as a critical doctrine involves assimilating a work to preexisting normative notions of expression (which are sufficiently stable and dependable for everyone to agree to call them "reality").

Fried is not attacking straw men. The dominant line of nineteenth-century American art criticism as practiced in our own century has been more or less entirely conducted within this neutralizing conception of expression. One can read through the major book-length treatments of Sargent's, Homer's, or Eakins's work published in the twentieth century—from the pioneering work of Gordon Hendricks and Lloyd Goodrich to that of John Wilmerding and Elizabeth Johns more recently—and find almost no exceptions to this normative notion of artistic expression. What is left out of these realist accounts—just as it is left out of genre accounts—is, again, the imaginative conflicts and the personal eccentricities and idiosyncracies that went into the works of art.

In the particular instance of the work of Thomas Eakins, the painter Fried is here most interested in, Johns's concept of "American heroism," or Wilmerding's or Hendricks's descriptions of the psychological origins and social meanings of Eakins's work, more or less reduce the paintings to being expressions of historical conditions or biographical events in the artist's life. Insofar as they appeal to stable, acceptable, normative notions of reality independent of the works in question, they assume that, in effect, we all know what the painter and the painting are about before we even look at the work. The painting is an expression of the life and times of the artist. It dissolves into the biographical and historical conditions that are alleged to have generated it. There are no energies that escape such a form of understanding, or dare to question it. Anything that would radically threaten or violate normative assumptions about the established order of things is left out of the account.

If, under these other approaches, anything that is a little

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strange or wild in a work is ignored or explained away, Fried's goal might be said to be to restore the craziness or eccentricity to the works he examines. Thus he attempts to counter "the blandly normalizing bias" of realism and genre study with a heightened appreciation of what he calls, at different points, the "obsessions," the "calculated aggressions," the "monstrosity," or the "disturbance" of the works he examines. There are many ways this might be done. Fried tries to shift our attention back from the genre to the imagination of the individual artist, to restore to the critical description of the object a sense of the pressure of the idiosyncratic individual imagination engaged in a vexed and ambivalent act of creation.

As I have already suggested, there could be no more valuable task for a critic to perform, especially within the realm of nineteenth-century American art criticism. Fried is not alone in his attempt to save the artists he loves from the cozy and complacent misreadings of overfamiliarity. Among the younger generation of critics, Bryan Jay Wolf and David Lubin are engaged in comparable efforts to save American art from the bland readings of previous American art criticism.

But the proof of the pudding is in the eating, not in the noble intentions of the cook, and one moves through Fried's essay with a rising appreciation of the failure of his effort. The problem arises not with his general critical goal, which borders on being heroic, but with his particular means of achieving it. As the language I quoted above would suggest, Fried finds what he calls a thematics of violence, aggression, and distortion in Eakins's work. But the principal violence documented in his book, unfortunately, is the violence his own language and procedures do to the works he examines.

Consider the following discussion of the figure who has come to be accepted as that of the mother of the patient on the operating table in Eakins's *The Gross Clinic*. She sits off to one side of the central space in obvious grief and pain, as her son is operated on. Here is Fried's account of her:

> . . . the extremity of affect expressed in her left hand's violent contortion is apprehended by the viewer as a threat—at a minimum, an offense—to vision as such, though simultaneously the viewer's attention is drawn, as if against its will, to the thin gold wedding band on the fourth finger of that hand. This is a further instance of the ambivalence or dividedness I have already attributed to the viewer's relation to *The Gross Clinic*. (The offense to vision is compounded by what almost seems a hint of

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> monstrosity in the region of the mother's forehead . . . . I don't mean to suggest that the mother's features are imagined by Eakins as literally monstrous, only that it is impossible for the viewer to make sense of what is depicted of her profile and that this is nearly as disturbing as the clawlike hand itself.)

This passage can stand as a summary of many of the essential qualities of Fried's writing. On the positive side, one wants to acknowledge how lively his prose is. But the thrills and chills of Fried's writing are also the problem with it. Every page, practically every paragraph, is as overwrought in its diction as this one. This is more than a stylistic quibble. Fried is committed in advance to a thematics of violence and disfiguration in the works he discusses (in his larger argumentative project, he is committed to maintaining that painting and writing in general enact a scene of violent and aggressive disfigurement that repels and confounds vision), and his language throughout the book merely plays out the consequences of the general conclusions at which he has obviously already arrived by the time he approaches the specific works in question. The result is a case study in argumentative tendentiousness and the loading of terms.

In this linguistic hothouse, everything is extraordinary and bizarre. Nothing is in the midrange of human experience. If a figure is turned or bent, it is "monstrous." If a fist is tensed, it is "clawlike." If an aspect of a painting is complexly visually presented, it is "a threat to vision," or it is what Fried, in a discussion of *Will Schuster and Blackman Going Shooting for Rail,* calls "explosive" of vision:

> The distancing called for by "pictorial" seeing is further encouraged by the most remarkable feature of *Will Schuster*, the incandescent red of Schuster's long-sleeved shirt, which by virtue of its coloristic explosiveness repels the viewer from the painting as with the force of a blast. Insofar as it also explodes the unity that "pictorial" seeing characteristically seeks to confirm, it recalls the peculiar, anarchic intensity of the reds not only in *The Gross Clinic* but in the early domestic interior scenes as well.

We have seen a comparable melodramatization of the process of artistic understanding in literary criticism most notoriously in what has come to be called reader-response analysis—though I think that Fried's viewer-response theatrics can be traced back before Stanley Fish to the art-appreciative onanism of Pater, Fry, or Bell.

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What all of these critics have in common is their tendency to make the text the site for a series of self-dramatizing imaginative associations and flights of fancy. It may make for a kind of high drama, but such criticism ultimately directs our attention more to the performance of the critic than to that of the artist he explicates.

As Fried's pun involving explosiveness in the shooting painting suggests, it is the critic who is doing all of the associating and connecting in these passages, not Eakins or his works. That is why such adjectival pressure has to be exerted by Fried. That is why his argument becomes so rhetorical. Precisely because the work is not authorizing his imaginative investment in it, he must make whatever interest that will accrue. Fried does it all. The figure of the distraught woman in *The Gross Clinic* is disfigured and made illegible only by Fried's treatment of it—not by Eakins's. In *Will Schuster* the gun is pointedly *not* firing, and the moment commemorated is emphatically *not* one that refers to its explosiveness, only Fried's pun does. (The painting is, in fact, about the patience, precision, and balance involved in stalking game and aiming at it—about a state of concentration and meditative poise—almost the opposite of the connotations evoked by Fried's overly ingenious reading.)

While Fried ponders the "extremity of affect" he encounters in Eakins, what he doesn't realize is that the reader is probably pondering the "extremity of affect" he encounters in Fried's own descriptions. Why is this critic so overwrought? Why is he so committed to a rhetoric of violence, distortion, and anarchy even where it is obviously inappropriate—not only in *Will Schuster*, but also in the domestic interior scenes, tonally closer to being meditative than to being "anarchic" in any respect, which he alludes to at the end of the previous quotation? (Even if his essay was originally commissioned to appear in *Representations*, there must be more to account for Fried's rhetoric than the current fashionableness of such violences of language and reference in "advanced" intellectual journals.)

However, Fried's personal psychohistory is less important than the larger critical issues his work raises. In the second half of the book the commentary turns to the work of Stephen Crane. Fried's approach to literature is, if anything, even more tendentious and loaded than his approach to painting. Consider his comments on the following passage from *The Red Badge of Courage* in which Henry Fleming encounters the body of a fallen soldier and notes, in Crane's characteristically chilly and ironic way, the touching pathos of death and of our bodies:

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> Once the line encountered the body of a dead soldier. He lay upon his back staring at the sky. He was dressed in an awkward suit of yellowish brown. The youth could see that the soles of his shoes had been worn to the thinness of writing paper, and from a great rent in one the dead foot projected piteously. And it was as if fate had betrayed the soldier. In death it exposed to his enemies that poverty which in life he had perhaps concealed from his friends.
>
> The ranks opened covertly to avoid the corpse. The invulnerable dead man forced a way for himself. The youth looked keenly at the ashen face. The wind raised the tawny beard. It moved as if a hand were stroking it. He vaguely desired to walk around and around the body and stare; the impulse of the living to try to read in dead eyes the answer to the Question.

Fried discusses this passage in conjunction with two similar ones from Crane's short stories and uses it to launch an argument that parallels the one he makes about Eakins, involving the work of art as a site for a drama enacted between writing and the artist's revulsion from writing. His observations about it follow:

> . . . in the production of these paradigmatic texts by Crane an implicit contrast between the respective "spaces" of reality and of literary representation—of writing (and in a sense, as we shall see, of writing/drawing)—required that a human character, ordinarily upright and so to speak forward-looking, be rendered horizontal and upward-facing so as to match the horizontality and upward-facingness of the blank page on which the action of inscription was taking place. Understood in these terms, Crane's upturned faces are at once synecdoches for the bodies of these characters and singularly concentrated metaphors for the sheets of writing paper that the author had before him, as is spelled out, by means of a displacement from one end of the body to the other, by the surprising description of the worn-down soles of the dead soldier's shoes in the passage from *The Red Badge*. (The displacement is retroactively signaled by the allusion to reading in the last sentence of the second paragraph.)
>
> Thus for example the size and proportions of a human face and that of an ordinary piece of writing paper are roughly comparable. An original coloristic disfiguration . . . by death making [the dead soldier's face] ashen . . . may be taken as evoking the special blankness of the as yet unwritten page . . . . [Additionally, the] further disfiguration [of the features of the face], by the wind that is said to have raised the soldier's tawny beard (in

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> this context the verb betrays more aggressive connotations than at first declare themselves) . . . defines the enterprise of writing—of inscribing and thereby in effect covering the blank page with text—as an "unnatural" process that undoes but also complements an equally or already "unnatural" state of affairs. (It goes without saying that the text in question is invariably organized in *lines* of writing, a noun that occurs, both in plural and singular form, with surprising frequency in Crane's prose, as for example in the [first] sentence).

It is, undeniably, a virtuoso critical performance. Fried's tendentiousness carries everything before it. One admires his ability to marshal his troops so ingeniously and to remain completely undaunted by conflicting artistic or worldly facts. In the first place, since he is committed in advance by his argument to describing the text as a site for writing, it becomes unimportant that a sheet of paper is not actually comparable in size to a face. (For those who haven't explored such arcana, I would point out that in my rough reckoning in front of a mirror, a face measures approximately only one-half the size of a sheet of standard typewriter paper, and I would further add that one of the few facts that we know conclusively about Stephen Crane's writing is that he used paper that was larger than standard typewriter size, paper that was approximately legal-sized, making the equation of the size of the face and that of the paper he used even less apt than it would otherwise be.)

It becomes further unimportant that in this passage the face is not metaphorized in terms of the qualities one would normally associate with a piece of paper (that is to say, it is not said to be "blank," or even "white," but rather is called "ashen"), or that the soldier's face and the reference to paper are not even mentioned in the passage in connection with each other. Since he is determined in advance to link the blankness of faces and pieces of paper, Fried can invoke a "displacement" and bravely move the paper metaphor from "one end of the body to the other." One's only objection is that in doing it, Fried attributes the movement to Crane, not to himself. That is what I mean by saying that Fried does it all. He freely and loosely moves around in the text, and then, by means of a kind of critical sleight of hand, attributes his movements to the text itself.

Finally, consider Fried's treatment of the relationship of the wind and the dead soldier's beard. Crane writes: "The wind raised the tawny beard. It moved as if a hand were stroking it." But committed to a rhetoric of disfiguration and violence, Fried turns this

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into an observation about "[the] further disfiguration [of the features of the face] by the wind that is said to have raised the soldier's tawny beard (in this context the verb betrays more aggressive connotations than at first declare themselves)." Fried says "in this context," but one wants to ask in what context? The controlling context Fried alludes to, the context that shapes his understanding, is not the context defined by *The Red Badge of Courage* itself, but the coercive context of his own argument about the work. The wind's stroking of the beard betrays aggressive and disfiguring connotations, because Fried's argument requires them, independently of the passage itself. The language of the passage itself is, in fact, not "aggressive" or "violent," but really quite tender and solicitous. In this case as elsewhere, Fried reveals himself to be as tone-deaf to language as the worst of the new critics before him. With his sternly cognitive attention to semantics, he doesn't hear what Robert Frost called the sound of sense, or certainly he could never treat this passage in such an emphatically disfiguring way.

Briefly put, the logical fallacy which allows Fried's interpretive violence to be perpetrated on the texts he examines involves a three-step process: first he hypostatizes a quality or aspect of a work or passage (for example, the "threat to vision" represented by the "disfigured" figure of the mother in *The Gross Clinic*); then he hypostatizes another quality or aspect of another work or passage (the "anarchic" and "incandescent . . . coloristic explosiveness" of the reds in *Will Schuster*); and then he relates the two qualities he has described at a more abstract level of analysis (in this example, so that Eakins's work is said systematically to embody a thematics of "violent" and "disfiguring" repelling of vision). The sleight of hand in all of this is that Fried is almost always comparing his own terms and observations with each other, not comparing or relating actual aspects of the works in question. Thus, as he reiterates on nearly every page of his argument, his observations at one point repeatedly recall his observations at another. The problem is that the expressive details of one text very seldom recall the details of another. In the terms of the above example, the color of Will Schuster's shirt or the alleged explosiveness of the subject matter in the one painting does not relate to the pain and grief of the mother in the other painting. Only the terms describing the two things relate.

After such strictures, I again want to emphasize how profoundly I sympathize with Fried's critical goals, if not with his practices. American art criticism must be saved from the repressiveness of realism and the narrowness of genre criticism, or the texts which

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are the subjects of its attention will be doomed to trivialization. Fried is right in arguing that these texts are imaginatively more unstable and interesting than they have been given credit for being in the past. The general uneasiness created by his criticism is not that it ferrets out imaginative disturbances in texts that have none, but that the disturbances it finds trivialize the texts in their own way as badly as the realist criticism did in its way.

Put briefly, the expressive effects Fried describes in the works he examines are alternately either too esoteric and technical or too eccentric and extreme to be convincing. On the one hand, as his concentration on the thematics of writing and drawing suggests, the meanings he traces are frequently so involved with the merely technical or formal details of the production of a text that we are back in the old dreariness of works of art being sterilely about themselves or their own processes of being created. On the other hand, the thematics of violence and disfigurement that he attributes to these texts is so excessive and melodramatic that it makes them apparently speak only to the most extreme or deranged states of feeling and awareness in us. In either case the text is made irrelevant to the experience of ordinary life as it is lived by nonartists (and by artists when they are not actually creating their works). Or, to put it another way, in being melodramatically trumped up with such crude violences of expression and grand intensities of conflict, Eakins's and Crane's texts are not enriched but coarsened and made, in fact, less interesting, less complex, less nuanced, less intricately and subtly troubled than they actually are. The problem is that Fried makes these texts too simple.

Fried's criticism lives in exciting extremes; he gives us stirring contrasts, but almost nothing he describes in these works connects with or impinges on the middling, ambiguous, ambivalent conditions of our ordinary experience. As a result, what one loses sight of in his analysis is precisely the complex human meanings he seems so fervently to want to bring back into the works he examines. If Johns's talking about the "American heroism" represented by *The Gross Clinic* insufficiently recognizes the unstable play of imaginative energies and the conflicts of feeling present in the painting, Fried's microscopic focus on the importance of the color red, the concealment of one surgeon's figure, and the figural distortions of the patient's body makes the disturbances he claims to see in the work seem merely formal and therefore irrelevant to the practicalities of our daily lives. In his tendentious discussions of the technical aspects of

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Eakins's or Crane's work—like his lengthy attention to the legibility of both artists' handwriting—Fried neglects the less dramatic but more engaging realistic narrative interests that make their texts matter so much to us. In short, if all that Eakins's and Crane's work tells us is what Fried says they do, just as if all they tell us is what Johns and Goodrich say they do, they truly don't deserve to have such attention lavished on them.

The task set for American art criticism in the future will be to find a way to be responsive to the practical, frequently prosaic, always realistic, human situations and concerns with which these works obviously engage themselves, without being repressive of the destabilizing imaginative and emotional energies also present in the same works. What one searches for is, in effect, a third position as an alternative to the two I have described—one not captive to the psychological and social normativeness and narrative neutralizations of realism, and yet, one not willfully reading into the work hermetic formal references or eccentric violences of expression.

The art of both Eakins and Crane pits commitments to narrative realism and social forms of expression against transcendental impulses that are essentially critical of all social arrangements and realistic expressions. That is the vexed, double agenda of the greatest works of nineteenth-century American art. An adequate criticism would not reject or ignore the normative, social forms of expression in these works, but itself do what Eakins's and Crane's work daringly does: acknowledge the centrality of realistic forms of expression, even as it simultaneously offers a radical critique of their limitations.

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POEMS

Blake Morrison

SPRING

That year the year could not get shifting.
Magpies chammered like an engine refusing to fire.
The crocuses were deeply into themselves,
locked in the sooty mantra of their cowls.
No sign of life in the sacs of frogspawn
as they swagged in just-unfrozen ponds.

On the fourteenth of April the bombers left,
a ghost-life of snow slipping from their wings
as the engines warmed, then the desperate sprint
till they lifted with the awkwardness of bustards,
holding a formation like the ten of spades
out across the flatlands to the coast.

And almost at once the field was off—
goosegrass with its hooks getting the hang of things,
brambles laying wire along the backs of hedges,
wafts of bilberry from the orchard,
and up the winding stair of its own making
convolvulus expansive in its cups.

The wheel comes round and the potter pulls up
a stocking of clay. If only we believed
nothing can stop these miracles of burgeoning,
the haws, the umbrils, the ink in the frogspawn,
our kids running for shelter from the paddling pool,
fresh grass mowings velcro'd to their legs.

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Michael Longley

CATHEDRAL

I

Between the bells and prayers a flower-seller calls
Prices and flower-names the dome translates to echoes,
As though a pigeon had flapped in from the piazza
And perched on the chalice and sipped the sacrament.

II

Because it was dragged on a cart to the cathedral
By untamed calves, the wooden body has emerged
From candle-smoke and incense and, dressed up as God,
Moves through the market to locate those animals.

III

The puppy supposed to suggest a faithful wife
Has nearly nipped her toes for centuries, and begs
To be taken for a walk outside this building
Where stones eat flesh and moonlight eats the stones.

THE SHACK

I lie awake between the two sleeping couples.
Their careful breathing in the Blue Ridge Mountains
Disturbs me more than the engine ticking over
At the end of the lane, the repetitive whippoorwill,
The downpour's crescendo on corrugated iron.

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Though there are no doors between them and me, perhaps
They will risk making love like embarrassed parents
While I remain motionless on my creaking divan.
They have shown me a copperhead, indian fire pinks
And buzzards like mobiles where the storm clouds hang.
I might as well be outside in the steamy field
Interrupting again the opossums' courtship,
Paralysing with torchlight pink noses, naked tails
Just beyond the shithouse where, like a fall of snow,
The equalising lime has covered our excrement.
Tomorrow when we pass the Pentecostal church
The wayside pulpit will read "Thanks, Lord, for the rain."

Medbh McGuckian

YEASTLIGHT

You speak like the rain, as if you were the weather.
I can almost see the passage of wine through your throat
As you swallow, its colour seems to be standing
Behind you, in the designer blue air. When I found
In the very cup of the town those poems sewn
Into cushions, or pushed into saucepans or shoes,
I took the arm of someone I didn't know
Who turned over all my mattresses
And shook out every book.

I could not have imagined pearls had such warmth,
My house planned to catch the sun in all
Its rooms, in the shape of a fan, seemed no better
Than other houses; its clear note had gone out
And fallen in with the wind which sometimes
Sounds so much like rain, the passing
Of wise hands over shoulders, the frisking
Of clothing that remoulds you and restrains you,
Back into the narrow bed of a girl.

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Still my dining-room with its gold oak-leaf
Paper, has three long windows looking west
Upon a ligulate forest, and famille rose,
Famille verte, china for an up-with-the-kettle,
Round-with-the-car, man, if you could not bear
To have it going on one moment longer,
Doors with their fertile roar, their desert
Glances, closing from the inside, not the out,
Or to have it ever stopped.

Charles Tomlinson

ANNIVERSARY

for Beatrice

Over our roof the planes climb west.
I caught today far out in space
A jet gone inching up the stratosphere
Vertically from a stand of trees,
Over, then down to disappear
Nose-diving the horizon. On high
An arc of vapour scored the shape
One could take the planet's improbable measure by;
Then, as it began to fray and fade
Bits of the bridge came floating down the sky
Combed by the wind. Yet out of view
That arc went rounding on and on
And, half a world away, took also you
Under its wing, reminding this spring day
What day it was by writing it overhead
In a script that only April and you can read.

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VARIANT ON A LINE OF HUGHES

"The sea cries with its meaningless voice."
What, then, could the sea's meaning be?
An ermined cape for some resting deity?
Visible accompaniment to our sorrows, fears,
Vaster than Bluebeard's self-reflecting lake of tears?
What poetry we could make from so trim a fit—
Each metaphor a proof for the truth of it.
But outmeaning the meanings fancy can congeal
Throngs at the ear the tidebeat of the real.

Anne Stevenson

WOUNDS

The world is the world
but we ask it the wrong questions.

What have you done to me?
Why have you hurt me?

Its full stop hangs from our necks
like a pitted moon.

What is the use of it?
Why do I suffer?

As each crater widens in a laser wreath
letting in the unbearable light.

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John Sims

FROM MANNERS OF SPEAKING

All the beautiful books, all the clear images
await the ear, the leap into the mind
full of fresh nerves, not regular from utterance
As rain begins to stutter on the seemingly hard land
As marble angels stand torpidly at a sepulchre
to be rubbed out in the resurrection of the living and the dead
As gold garments of stiff thread measured to the weather
As a crow frozen to the only window in the house
As the steps on which even the most subtle clatter
as they walk up to the Governor's mansion.
As you speak and live in the imagination of being heard.
As you are heard even while drifting out of minds.
As language is the sullen ecology in which we suppose
existing.
As from language we heard of good and evil
and most secret techniques of murder
As from language.

Alison Fell

THE MISTRESSES

Welsh winter: jealous goats
butt to be petted. Long white
cat on my shoulder. Grey dog
with its colonel's eyebrows
hogging the fire. Outside, bantams
to keep from the Christmas fox,
and rabbits aureoled in the torchlight.

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You're in the woodshed, mossy-haired
and murdering logs. Your rages
are diurnal, like coast winds
or the rite of milking. Sun-up
and moonrise, these are dead
lovers' limbs in your wheelbarrow.

I appeal to the mirror
and your intelligence. Look
at the silk and size of us,
our fleece and unction.
See how we burn, not wives
but mud witches kneading
the hot udder of the goat,
our laughter glittering
over the white spirt, while
stars pepper our night heads,
and the memories of our loves
festoon us like warm animals.

C. H. Sisson

THINGS

It is unbuilding now,
All I have to do
—Down, down and down.
It did not matter, no.

A man should have a thought
Or so I thought
But why did I think that?
I suppose, caught

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By time and place,
By a name or by a face.
Why not? For then and there
That was my case.

Things rule, O.K.? The mind
Is left behind:
Dazed and amazed, numb
Not, alas, blind.

Douglas Oliver

NOT IN ANOTHER PHOTO

Your photo in a newspaper. The hotel
fire. No. That's a mistake on
the uneasily-stirring vehicle
of day. The paper,
bearing a dead woman's photo
slides over cracks to
lie half in evening. Our child
is safe with us, meanwhile
a burnt female body
soaks in your chest where
children have already drowned. Warm
nightwinds arrive. We hurry our son
out to the car. Your charred body
sits away from me in the corner
You look as dead as a queen, not
in another photo, I mean a real
queen, waving. The seat between us moves.
This journey will express the
jerkiness of fear, not its passion, to
drive through cold flames, light passing
across your face. The hotels
of conversation are all on fire
under the wheels.

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THE FERRY PIRATE (VARIATIONS)

When the brain's black with demonic crisis
and its inky sea peopled with lights
that prompt memory, loved souls
are borne out on the wake from high boatsides
and in that world of waters float lit rooms
wandering away to past sunsets. Swaying,
the terrain of darkness lost to you.

And always a mother ashamed to have suffered,
always marriages left inland,
always the sea carrying out black pram covers,
the wandering of unsteady thoughts;
then the
whispering at the captain's voice tube says:
"When I came early to my new love, Cariclea,
I found her kinsfolk weeping
for her old love and she far too faithful,
despite the sea changing either through time or fortune,
and I carried her away across the blackening waters."
You won't find quite this in Heliodorus.

That sea is always fairly near
under the rails of night ferries,
swaying with unsteady thoughts, blackening in crisis,
roughening with time or fortune, drawn on
by inkless nibs, as if the written surface
were integral with liquid rooms of memory
distorted in the currents undersea.

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That sea is always unsteady with thoughts,
polluted by the pram covers carried out
into tracks of moonlight
borne towards lit rooms beyond the horizon
memories of loved kitchens
where the dead kinsfolk sit down to a table
distorted in a childhood's inky sketchbook,
washed in black, bound in black.

To have left a mother suffering far inland,
to have sensed the pram covers heaving away from
the moonlight track and faces sinking like flat-fish
under a sea peopled with receding lights
governed by smoky stars
and then to have seen
a modern Cariclea in the dress of Grecian white
a handbag strap as if of the quiver of arrows
walk down the scudding ferry deck
entering risks of piracy in a classic romance,
this, in another poem the cause of melancholy.

But here the sea is not integral with the writing
and keeps bearing the lights and memories away.
At moments of crisis,
the voyager sways from the rail towards her:
you won't quite find the classic mood in him or her.

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THE STATE OF POETRY

SELECTED POEMS. By Tony Harrison. Random House. $15.95.
WAR MUSIC: AN ACCOUNT OF BOOKS 16–19 OF HOMER'S ILLIAD. By Christopher Logue. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $12.95.
SELECTED POEMS 1968–1986. By Paul Muldoon. Ecco Press. $19.50.

"Where there is amenability to paraphrase," wrote Osip Mandelstam, "there the sheets have not been rumpled—there poetry has not spent the night." The poet was championing a particular kind of language-originated lyricism. The ear, believed Mandelstam, would infallibly lead the pen away from abstraction, from ideas. He would have delighted in following the evolution of the young Northern Irish poet, Paul Muldoon: his every developmental stage is marked by poems more accurately and more adventurously *listened* onto the page.

The earliest work gathered in Muldoon's *Selected Poems 1968–1986* is the most conventional. Deft anecdotal sketches follow the off-kilter ripple and roll of a situation or build upon the telling irregularity of some vernacular utterance. Already, though, the special gift is evident. There is an eccentric precision to the narrative strokes, a willful obliquity that transforms the commonplace, and a clear fondness for the sounds of words:

> Old photographs would have her bookish, sitting
> Under a willow. I take that to be a croquet-
> Lawn. She reads aloud, no doubt from Rupert Brooke.
> The month is always May or June.
>
> Or with any stranger on the motor-bike.
> Not my father, no. This one's all crew-cut
> And polished brass buttons.
> An American soldier, perhaps.
>
> And the full moon
> Swaying over Keenaghan, the orchards and the cannery,
> Thins to a last yellow-hammer, and goes.
> The neighbors gather, all Keenaghan and Collegelands,
> There is story-telling. Old miners at Coalisland
> Going into the ground. Swinging, for fear of the gas,
> The soft flame of a canary.
>
> —"Ma"

But these are just the first evolutionary stirrings. In the poems that follow, from the books *Why Brownlee Left* and *Quoof*, the

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trademark Muldoon style starts to emerge. The poet is more willing to let language have its head and to be led along to singular discoveries. Wordplay is taken seriously, allowing for an idiosyncratic lyric edge. A poem like "Truce," for example, obviously came to life more from a fidgeting with half-rhymes than from some embracing thematic conception:

> It begins with one or two soldiers
> And one or two following
> With hampers over their shoulders.
> They might be off wildfowling.

This is not to say, however, that Muldoon ignores the deeper claims of subject. The obdurate real world can nearly always be found, startlingly there, at the far side of his words.

Nearly always. Muldoon does also have a penchant for a kind of lengthy humoresque in which surrealistic situations are strung out (rather in the manner of middle-period Bob Dylan) until little but verbal sport remains. Lines like the following, good for a nod and a wink, don't really stand up under much rereading:

> The billiard-player had been big, and black,
> Dressed to kill, or inflict a wound,
> And had hung around the pin-table
> As long as it took to smoke a panatella.
> I was clinging to an ice-pack
> On which the Titanic might have foundered
> When I was suddenly bedazzled
> By a little silver knick-knack
> That must have fallen from his hat-band.
> I am telling this exactly as it happened.
> —from "Immramm"

But Muldoon's most recent poems, from the collection *Meeting the British,* easily redeem these stretches of gratuitous cleverness. The tour de force of this group, representing the poet at his most daring and auditorially complex, is the long sequence "7, Middagh Street," which sets forth in their different voices the notorious *and* unconventional lodgers—Carson McCullers, Gypsy Rose Lee, Benjamin Britten, Salvador Dali, among others—of the Brooklyn Heights rooming house that W. H. Auden presided over for a time. The work suffers under the excerpting knife, but a small cutting (in the

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voice of Carson McCullers) might serve to suggest the charm and sophistication of Muldoon's latest idiom:

> The magnolia tree at my window's a bonsai
> in the glass globe
> I jiggle like a cocktail-
> waiter from the Keynote Club,
> so that Chester's Kwaikiutl
> false face and glib,
> Jane and Paul Bowles, the chimpanzee
>
> and its trainer, Gypsy
> and hers, are briefly caught up in an eddy
> of snow; pennies
> from heaven, Wynstan's [sic] *odi*
> *atque amo* of Seconal and bennies:
> then my cloudy
> globe unclouds to reveal the tipsy
>
> MacNeice a monarch
> lying in state on a Steinway baby grand
> between the rotting
> carcasses of two pack-mules from *Un Chien Andalou*
> picks out a rondo
> in some elusive minor key.

Tony Harrison, born (1937) and raised in working-class Leeds, educated at the University of Leeds, is in many ways Muldoon's opposite number. Where Muldoon goes in search of the singular shape, the unrepeatable lyric signature, Harrison is a man for the syllable count and the rhyme. To the extent that such a practice defines the formalist, he is a formalist. But he is no maker of filagrees. There is nothing decorous or formally ingenious about his lines or structures (most commonly sixteen-line sonnets). His antecedents are the piston-stroke lines and straight rhymes of Kipling, of Auden's ballads, of stage and music hall.

Like his contemporary, the Scots poet Douglas Dunn, Harrison alternately celebrates and scorns the status of the "barbarian" working-class outsider. His very best poems play off what are perceived as the awkward and gnarled speech idioms of that class against the linguistic expectations of the ruling culture. We see this clearly in a series of coming-of-age poems, included from his aptly titled collection, *The School of Eloquence:*

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Outside the whistled gang-call, *Twelfth Street Rag,*
then a Tarzan yodel for the kid who's bored,
whose hand's on his liana . . . no,back
to Labienus and his flaming sword.

Off laiken', then to t'fish oil all the boys
off tartin', off to t'flicks but on, on, on,
the foldaway card table, the green baize,
De Bello Gallico and lexicon.

It's only his jaw muscles that he's tensed
into an enraged *shit* that he can't go;
down with polysyllables, he's against
all pale-face Caesars, *for* Geronimo.

He shoves the frosted attic skylight, shouts:

Ah bloody can't ah've gorra Latin prose.
His bodiless head that's poking out 's
like patriarchal Cissy-bleeding—ro's.
—"Me Tarzan"

In the deeply affecting sequence that follows this chronicle of an ill-sorted youth, Harrison narrates the deaths of both his parents. First, the mother dies, leaving father and son together in an empty house and bringing on long-deferred kinds of reckoning. Then the father is gone, too, and the son is forced to search out what belongs to him, both in his vanishing heritage of class and in his only partially conquered "higher" world of school and literature. Here, too, Harrison thrusts the spoken idiom up against the standardized, eliciting humor as well as pathos, holding both in check with rhyme and meter:

Last meal together, Leeds, the Queen's Hotel,
That grandish pile of swank in City Square.
Too posh for me! he said (though he dressed well)
If you weren't wi' me now ah'd nivver dare!

I knew that he'd decided that he'd die
not by the way he lingered in the bar,
nor by the look he'd give with one good eye,
nor the firmer handshake and the gruff *ta-ra,*

but when we browsed the station bookstall sales
he picked up *Poems from the Yorkshire Dales*—

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'ere tek this un wi' yer to New York
to remind yer 'ow us gaffers used to talk.

The broken lines go through me speeding South—

As t'Doctor stopped to oppen woodland yet . . .
and
wi' skill they putten wuds reet i' his mouth.
—"The Queen's English"

Reading a number of Harrison's poems in sequence, however, one starts to feel the ear go a bit slack at the monotony of the rhythms. And occasionally the suspicion arises that the poet finds it rather easy to "do" a certain kind of poem. Or that rhyme is the principal mode of transport from one notion to the next. This is especially evident in some of the longer poems he includes—"The White Queen" and "A Kumquat for John Keats"—where the ceremony of marrying two word sounds seems more important than the love which purportedly brought them together. The bulk of the book, though, remains original, thoroughly convincing in its projection of embattled identity.

Most readers of poetry by now know the story behind Christopher Logue's *War Music: An Account of Books 16 to 19 of Homer's Iliad:* how Donald Carne-Ross, then at the BBC, invited (or incited) the poet to try his hand at rendering parts of the *Iliad*; how Logue had the temerity, being without Greek, to stitch together—cutting, taking cues from other versions, *inventing*—what has proved to be an astonishingly beautiful *sui generis* artifact. Is it an *Iliad*? I think even Logue would say no. For one thing, he has eliminated precisely those elements, the stock words and phrases, upon which its status as an oral epic was based (according to Milman Parry and Albert Lord). But it *is* a living, breathing entity, a poem that builds itself up not from the manipulation of translated idioms but from freshly imagined—newly seen, tested, felt—details and sensations.

Logue has isolated the episodes that make up Book 16, or *Patrocleia*—which, he notes in his preface, "might be described as a miniature version of the *Iliad*," and which culminates in the death of Patroclus—through Book 19, or *Pax*, which has "disaffected allies settling their differences in order to avoid defeat at the hands of a mutual enemy."

But plot is not so important here. What will mesmerize the reader is the sharp, swift, sensuous presentation of a wholly gripping

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narrative. Logue has learned much of his compositional method from Pound—his use of the vibrant image, his way of quick-cutting to expose the dominant shape of an event—but his eye and his sinewy rhythms are entirely his own. Here is a section from one of the battle scenes of *Patrocleia*:

> Patroclus aimed his spear where they were thickest.
> That is to say, around
> The chariot commander, Akafact.
> But as Patroclus threw
> The ship's mast flamed from stem to peak, and fell
> Lengthwise across the incident.
> Its fat waist clubbed the hull's top deck
> And the ship flopped sideways.
> Those underneath got crunched.
> And howling Greeks ran up
> To pike the others as they slithered off.
> This fate was not for Akafact:
> Because the mast's peak hit the sand no more than six
> Feet from Patroclus' car, the horses shied,
> Spoiling his cast. Nothing was lost.
> As he fell back, back arched,
> God blew the javelin straight; and thus
> Mid-air, the cold bronze apex sank
> Between his teeth and tongue, parted his brain,
> Pressed on, and stapled him against the upturned hull.
> His dead jaw gaped. His soul
> Crawled off his tongue and vanished into sunlight.

There is so much to remark and to praise: the rich yet accurate phrasing—"Its fat waist clubbed the hull's top deck"—the forceful originality of the verbs—"flopped," "slithered," "stapled"—and, not least, the rhythmic control. Observe how the thronging stresses of the penultimate line—"His dead jaw gaped. His soul"—set up the startling lightness of the last: "Crawled off his tongue and vanished into sunlight." What lovely things can result when the crusts are broken off the classics.

SVEN BIRKERTS

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THE SUNSET MAKER. By Donald Justice. Atheneum. $16.00
FORESEEABLE FUTURES. By William Matthews. Houghton Mifflin Co. $13.95.
THE LOTUS FLOWERS. By Ellen Bryant Voigt. W. W. Norton and Co. $13.95.

Unlike most of his generation, whose inclinations led them to write in free verse and open forms, Donald Justice developed a virtuosity as a formal poet. And although such virtuosity might have turned arch or predictable in a lesser writer's hands, Justice used his to exploit and extend the formal resonance of such conventions as the sonnet, sestina, and villanelle. In *The Sunset Maker* he has put his talents in the service of fashioning a Proustian or sublime myth out of the Depression era of his South Florida childhood. Like Randall Jarrell's childhood Southern California, Justice's 1930s Miami holds the beginnings of his aesthetic awakening. This awakening he records in the "Busts of the great composers" that "Glimmered in niches, pale stars" of the house of his first piano teacher, Mrs. Snow, who "Could tower above her pupils like an alp, / An avalanche threatening sudden / Unasked for kindnesses." A trilogy of poems about his three piano teachers along with an antecedent prose memoir form the center of the book, around which spread the concentric circles of the poet's life.

Included in these widening orbits is a series of elegies for friends, such as the poet Robert Boardman Vaughn, the bassoonist John Lenox, and the composer Carl Ruggles. The elegies are meant to show the diminishing effect that time and experience have on the dreams and innocence of childhood as well as on our romantic ambitions. In "Little Elegy for Piano and Cello," all the "Sequestered mornings in the studio, / The perfect ear, the technique, the great gift" of Carl Ruggles have been reduced to "one ghostly phrase," a run of six notes, which a handful of people may or may not remember. The most stunning poem in the collection is an elegy for his mother, "Psalm and Lament," in which the "drenched and twisted" sheets of her deathbed become the "very handkerchiefs of grief." The consistency of tone throughout the volume unifies the common themes that wind through the poems, memoir, and stories; the mix of genres works by contrast to emend and extend their shared subjects. All but the final story, "Artificial Moonlight," in which melancholy occasionally slips into melodrama, feels necessary

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to Justice's purpose. Although Justice has been playing variations on some of these themes for years, *The Sunset Maker* is as complete and unified a transcription as we are likely to get; it gives us what Virginia Woolf said James gives us: "the mellow light which swims over the past . . . the shadow in which the detail of so many things can be discerned."

Like Donald Justice, Ellen Bryant Voigt is preoccupied with the past, memory, and the emblematic innocence of childhood. But where Justice finds in his childhood the genesis of a sublime sensibility, Voigt finds in hers the blood ties that link her physically and emotionally to the Virginia landscape of her parent's farm. Both poets return to the South for their childhoods, yet their methods—Justice's impressionistic and Voigt's realistic—differ immensely. Whereas Justice sounds the clear ramifying nostalgia of Jarrell's *The Lost World,* Voigt echoes the dense particularity of Roethke's greenhouse poems. To this she adds something of the Southern Gothic—a fascination with the terrible spiritual power of violence, such as that attributed to the grandfather in "Short Story" who, though "a slight, quiet man, / smaller than most women," kills a mule with a hammer; or the father in "Nightshade" who, learning that "a dash of strychnine in its meat / could be a tonic for a dog, an extra edge," exaggerates the dose and kills the hound.

Behind the naturalistic detail of Voigt's poems we feel the pressure of a moral world with its paradox of good and evil. In "Nightshade" she writes, "without pure evil in the world, / there was no east or west, no polestar / and no ratifying dove." The first two sections of *The Lotus Flowers* attempt to justify or resolve this paradox or at least find a place where "grieving has an end." But there is no such place, and in the final section Voigt leads us to the discomforting but inescapable knowledge that only death—through its mysterious silence—resolves the moral paradox. Occasionally the moral weight of a poem, such as "At the Movie: Virginia, 1956," feels too heavy and strains the delicacy of its detail and incident.

The Lotus Flowers is a full and mature work, and it marks the culmination of themes and concerns which Ellen Bryant Voigt set out for herself in her first two books, *Claiming Kin* and *The Forces of Plenty.* This is a book that will attract many more admiring readers to Voigt's work, especially those who believe that a poem should be clear and accessible and concern itself with the rescue and transformation of a life.

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Different from the coastal light of Justice's Southern Florida and the sharp detail of Voigt's Virginia is the geography shaped by the intelligence and wit of William Matthews's poems. Matthews is a poet whose temperament bends toward the aphoristic and epigrammatic: "Style is the rind of the soul we can persuade to die with us," or, "In writing, skill is the major share of courage." His diction, which has always been preternaturally inspired and gleefully clever, is as supple and inclusive as ever in *Foreseeable Futures*. Few poets writing today can pull off with such panache the "dribble glasses" found in the poem "Fellow Oddballs," or the "slow urinary hiss" of a tape looping in the black box of a flight recorder, or the "coiled wiring" of a severed vas deferens which a doctor is stuffing "back in like a flustered motorist / struggling to refold a road map." Except in a few places, Matthews is able to avoid the major risk of such writing, which is its propensity to turn into glib and excessive patter.

Organized around a sequence of thirty fifteen-line poems which also includes a half-dozen others of various lengths, *Foreseeable Futures* is about the "very middle, the exact / fulcrum of our lives." At this pivotal place Matthews fights the urge to take shelter in a comfortable nostalgia, but rather chooses to face the future, "joyless but content," mindful that illness and death "wait for us / in the yard, like shadows furled in bud." To this end we often find the speaker of his poems in need of repair or alteration—physical and spiritual—and whose main concern is in providing evidence, to himself, that his ailing body and soul are still serviceable artifacts. The patient in "Recovery Room" works hard to demonstrate that feeling has returned to his lower torso by coaxing a few bubbles of gas from his bowels, "like a truculent champagne."

Although the future that Matthews foresees on the Styx side of the fulcrum forever insults and humiliates us with its random tragedies, he offers in our defense the dignity of a stoic and humorous intelligence. The first requirement for acquiring such intelligence is to give up regret and self-pity and to take on the fact of our inelegant demise. The best we can do in such a situation is to meet it with the unflappable equanimity of those pilots on Air Florida Flight #7, whose last exchange, Matthews reminds us in "Black Box," was: "'We're going down.' / 'I know.'"

MICHAEL COLLIER

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IN TIME AND PLACE. By John Hollander. Johns Hopkins University Press. $16.50.

In 1958, W. H. Auden selected John Hollander's first book of poems, *A Crackling of Thorns,* for the Yale Series of Younger Poets. In his introduction to that volume, Auden observes: "In the pleasure he takes in begetting closely knit verbal clans, Mr. Hollander is a traditionalist, but he also shows a desire, characteristic of our own time, for the maximum amount of physical diversity." I take Auden's figure to mean that among the words of Hollander's carefully crafted poems there are few strays or orphans; words are linked to other words, lines to lines, and stanzas to stanzas by family likenesses of rhyme, meter, rhetorical rhythm, and visual patterning, as well as by deeper bonds of figure and image. And yet, while these are the materials of what Auden calls a "traditionalist," the manipulation of these materials does not beget uniformity, repetition, or redundancy, but rather the opposite, a startling diversity of verse surfaces and depths, a diversity which surprises and refreshes us as we proceed from song to lyric, lyric to discursive meditation.

Thirty years and fourteen volumes of poetry later, the terms of Auden's introduction still stand. In fact, they can be expanded and used to describe Hollander's newest book, *In Time and Place.* The traditionalist in Hollander patrols what he himself, in *Vision and Resonance* (1975), describes as the "diachronic" axis of verse, the axis he associates with literary history, poetic convention, and generic categories. In the first section of the new book, "In Time," which is the only section in verse, the poem "Others Who Have Lived in the Room" provides an excellent example of how Hollander works this diachronic axis:

> Why have I locked myself inside
> This narrow cell of four-by-four,
> Pacing the shined, reflecting floor
> Instead of running free and wide?

The room or narrow cell is, of course, the *In Memoriam* stanza itself, which Hollander uses throughout the thirty-five poems of "In Time." Echoing another meditation on poetic form and its limits, Wordsworth's "Nuns Fret Not at Their Convent's Narrow Room," Hollander moves beyond his initial consideration of fixed versus free

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forms to trace the genealogy of his stanza. More than a lesson in literary history, his tracing culminates in this glossing of the form:

> An emblem of love's best and worst:
> *Marriage* (where hand to warm hand clings,
> Inner lines, linked by rhyming rings);
> *Distance* between the last and first) . . .

As he himself has argued, any self-glossing by a poet is a poem in itself, and Hollander has made himself a master of the self-glossing poem: "Why must I always play / The stanza called *abba* / In books of *ars poetica*?" To those misled by the false distinction between "art" and "experience," those who distrust what they dismiss as poems about poetry, Hollander's poetic pacing of the shined, reflecting floors, which give back images of himself and his poems, will not be satisfying. But what the misled miss, and what is so profoundly satisfying about *In Time and Place*, is that it thoroughly mythologizes poetic technique; prosody becomes trope. The minute operations of poetic form come to signify the operations of awareness in all its phases, from the cognitive awareness which measures and marks the world to the erotic awareness which knows what it knows in a wholly different way.

What is more, the physicality of poetic form—its auditory, visual, kinesthetic phenomenology—stands in Hollander's world for other kinds of physical experience, especially the possession of what is desired but never had or of what has been had and now is lost. Stevens warns us that "The greatest poverty is not to live / In a physical world, to feel that one's desire / Is too difficult to tell from despair" ("Esthetique du Mal"). (An earlier master of the *ars poetica,* Stevens enters *In Time and Place* in one of its final prose pieces, "Asylum Avenue," although Hollander never names Stevens, referring to him only by means of a note which tells us that "A poet walked to his office along this street in Hartford.") But Hollander does live in a physical world, the intensely physical world of verse schemes and structures in which his reader experiences acutely the material realities of written language. Admittedly, his persistent attention to the phenomenology of verse implicitly acknowledges the great poverty of which Stevens warns. After all, who would live in a world of written language if, in our everyday world, desire were not too difficult to tell from despair? But such persistent attention also insists that the physical richness of formally organized language

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must both represent and replace what is missing: "For want of you and readings of / The body's texts, I turn to signs" ("Telling Fortune").

When Auden contrasts Hollander's traditionalism with his desire "for the maximum amount of physical diversity," he anticipates the different ways in which *In Time and Place* manipulates physical signs, particularly the set of signs we call language, in order to question, even dismantle, time, tradition, and the burden of the past. At the center of "In Time" is the loss of a "you," perhaps an actual person, perhaps a muse or fantasy, perhaps some combination of the two. Hollander addressed the poems of his last book, *Powers of Thirteen* (1983), to an ambiguous "you" and may be asking us to read *In Time and Place* as something of a sequel to that volume. But whereas the earlier book celebrates the relationship with "you," the later one laments its passing.

The division of *In Time and Place* into three parts, the first beginning "these still measured lines / Shall wander yet, slowly to mark / A journey through a kind of dark," cannot help but recall Dante's pilgrimage. Hollander's journey is, among other things, a formal one from verse poems to an intriguing prose journal written in disappearing ink ("In Between") and on to a group of thirty short sketches or prose poems ("In Place"). Does this formal journey simply confirm Hollander's desire for physical diversity, or does it imply some sort of progress, like Dante's journey? An answer of sorts lies in the epigraph to the volume:

> Desire, the Other, Loss, the World of Now and Then, give way in time to Here and There, the *where's* which mime the *who's* among which we are hurled by virtue merely of being in and among ourselves: then place will represent the absent face, lost voices hum in scenes, in seeing itself; as firm lines decompose into grim dust that never sings, their Truth shakes ashes from its wings and rises once more into prose.

Once again, it is tempting to hear this passage as a variation on a theme by Stevens: "Life is an affair of people not of places. But for me life is an affair of places and that is the trouble" ("Adagia"). A place is individuated space. For Stevens, the individuation of space into places, which the self can know and call its own, poses a full-time challenge: "From this the poem springs: that we live in a place / That is not our own and, much more, not ourselves" ("Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction"). Engaged in the huge ontological and epistemo-

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logical task of placing itself, the self has little left over to give to other selves; and that, as Stevens sees it, is the trouble. For Hollander, the individuation of space into places corresponds to, and becomes a metaphor for, the individuation of people into specific other selves, which the self can know and love. But, as his use of the *In Memoriam* stanza makes clear, he knows that loving and losing go hand in hand, and so *in time* places will come to stand for loved ones lost.

The terms of Hollander's journey now become clear. It is a journey in time through loss to the recognition of significant places and placements. The final twist he gives his journey is to associate time with verse and place with prose. The journey toward place then becomes a journey away from verse. On one level, the lost "you" of "In Time" may be a lost muse by whom the poet has been deserted. The final poem, "Shutting Up Shop," utters its farewell to verse in terms which pose new questions:

> Now, silence for a while, the still
> Work of days, loneliness of nights;
> Spilled trivia would choke delights
> If there were any left to kill.
>
> With fluttering heart and no success
> Poor Psyche sorted seeds, but sick
> Of Love's mad tasks, I turn to pick
> My way through piles of dailiness.

The moving mixture of sadness and exasperation here would seem to suggest that the departure from verse reflects defeat, not progress. In the terms of the epigraph, however, the decomposition of verse into prose signals not a surrender to the grim dust of unredeemed dailiness, but rather the phoenix-like recuperation of Truth. The journey towards prose, then, is a journey towards recognition, accommodation, and regeneration of a world impoverished by loss.

But nothing in Hollander's world lends itself easily to such fixed formulation. Just as the self-erasing journal of "In Between" comes back to haunt the writer with his writing, so verse decomposing into prose returns to reassert itself. For those who can hear in the "prose" epigraph the singing of three *abba* quatrains, *In Time and Place* is exactly the right book for here and now.

STEPHEN CUSHMAN

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BEYOND THE LIMIT: POEMS. By Irina Ratushinskaya. Translated by Frances Padorr Brent and Carol J. Avins. Northwestern University Press. $22.95.

Poems that were written in a forced labor camp on a bar of soap with a sharpened matchstick, to be washed away as soon as they were committed to memory, naturally raise the question of the poet's audience. Arrested in September 1982 and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for alleged political crimes, what hope did Irina Ratushinskaya have for ever getting through to a readership? She barely had the means to let her husband know that she was alive. Under such circumstances poetry could serve not as a means of communication among people but as an escape from reality or as a private exercise in self-definition.

Some of Ratushinskaya's poems do indeed indulge in flights of comforting fantasy, but these take up only a small part of this volume. Self-definition, on the other hand, can hardly be private for a political prisoner: it almost inevitably involves defining one's group affiliations. One of Ratushinskaya's central concerns as an artist is to be able to state in aesthetically satisfying terms who she is, as she lies beaten on a damp prison floor, in relation to Soviet society. "The pride of Helsinki Watch is not asleep," she writes jestingly about one of her fellow prisoners; "I hear from the breathing." There is another "lawbreaker" in a camp near Perm, she adds, who is not sleeping either. And another "obsessed" person, somewhere in Kiev, keeps tuning a receiver. There is an archipelago out there not only of prisons but also of people of her own kind, she asserts with a leap of faith. She calls them "the best in all the world, / the most tender, who don't break." The only qualification required for membership in this group is a refusal to lie. *Poem 1* records the stream of consciousness of a prisoner being tortured and being tempted, either by a torturer or by an inner voice of self-preservation, to succumb to lies:

> Be quiet—beg
> Not for ruin—for pardon—
> be quiet—say
> a word—and save
> yourself! In falsehood—
> do you want—humbled—
> to resurrect—life!

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It is only a small elite that is strong enough to resist falsehood; the rest, like the "rabble of birds" of the epigraph to the volume, are the obedient ones who march down Red Square in a May Parade. The rewards for belonging to this elite are that, unlike most people out there, you have friends you can trust, and that you have a sense of self-worth. But when you are in solitary confinement (as Ratushinskaya was, for one hundred thirty-eight days on one occasion), it takes a heroic effort to sustain faith not only in the ability of that group to help you in any way but even in its very existence. For all she knew, her fellow prisoners might all have broken down under torture, and the underground *literati* who had appreciated her poetry might all have made compromises with the authorities: after all, it is very tempting to live a half-lie in order to be able to tell a half-truth, and there is nothing easier than to get kneaded into the sticky philistine dough of official Soviet cultural life. Perhaps the most terrifying image showing the poet's isolation is that of a volume of poetry published only through *samizdat* and now lying forgotten in "archival decomposition," being "leafed by a rat's paw on a slimy table."

Beyond the Limit itself testifies to the fact that such oblivion was not in store for Ratushinskaya. Indeed, she was still in prison when her friends smuggled out of the Soviet Union the cycle of poems that had caused her arrest: these were published by Hermitage in 1984 as *Poems*, a trilingual Russian-French-English edition sponsored by International PEN. Subsequently Hermitage—which has become the major publisher of Russian underground and emigré literature—brought out a bilingual volume of her short stories, *A Tale of Three Heads,* as well (1986). Many of the poems she wrote in prison also reached her friends through channels which, as she said in an interview in *The New York Review of Books* (May 7, 1987), she would rather not reveal. These prison poems were just being shaped into *Beyond the Limit* when she was set free and eventually allowed to emigrate in the fall of 1986. As we become acquainted with more and more of her work, we realize that a major new poet has emerged from that fertile ground for literature, the torment of Soviet life. The bilingual *Beyond the Limit* shows the maturing of her art and offers the best translations so far, but as Avins says in the introduction, "The voice heard by readers of the English is inevitably in a different cadence, a different pitch, than that of the poet herself." One wishes that more American poets would come forward to attempt other approximations to the original.

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Ratushinskaya herself has gotten out, but the main concerns of her poetry—isolation, falsification, and oblivion—remain gnawing problems for the intellectual elite to which she belonged back home. The worst temptation a Soviet citizen can succumb to, as she puts it, is to "choke on sleep," not even realizing that one has lived. She promises her fellow inmates that as she passes through in a convoy she will "commit it all— / to memory—they won't take it away!" Carrying a volume of poetry imprinted on her brain is tantamount to bearing witness to Soviet life. What she fears is that after she has pressed her confused hands to the hole where her heart used to be, "they'll sew me a white legend, fitting it, / to array me," and they will "fling blame at the murdered— / Deny it, weasel out with lies." Her worst nightmare in this regard is that (in my translation) "over the place of execution time itself has had a weight loss and a hemorrhage."

Preserving memory is vital to Ratushinskaya, even if it is a recollection only of horrors. The cruelty of Russia's past is somehow a comfort to her, perhaps because it opens a wider perspective on the present. Several times she refers to places of execution as the "executioner's block," and her fondest image is a proud prince, "reflected light of blue-bloods," who ascends the scaffold unbending, "sure-footed—slowly—through the spittle, / and on dirty straw, through ages." The parodic rhyme "*po plevkam / po vekam*," transforming spittle—the filth of the present—into the glory of centuries, is perhaps the most powerful technical device in the volume. Another poem takes us back to ancient Greece, detailing with gusto how Odysseus, returning home, took revenge on his detractors. The sentence "to all who did evil, punishment meted / from lawful power" no doubt reflects what the poet would have liked to see befall her own captors, yet she does not let her emotions run away with her: she ends the poem with the ironic "now the slavewomen wipe blood from mosaics— / and happiness starts," which testifies to a perfect control of her medium.

Evoking poets of antiquity reminds one of Mandelstam. Indeed Ratushinskaya makes several references not only to him but to the other three giants of Russia's "Lost Generation," to Pasternak, Akhmatova, and Tsvetaeva. The shared experience of having read these poets bonds her even more strongly to the best Russian literary circles of today than do political convictions. The peculiarity of the Russian situation is that you break with tradition—that of official literature—by following a countertradition. Thus Ratushinskaya's

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poetry manages to be at once iconoclastic—going "beyond the limit"—and traditional.

The reasons why the Lost Generation grew suspicious of big words in the West were enhanced manifold under Russian conditions. One of the lessons Ratushinskaya has learned from her great predecessors is how to circumvent direct statement by allusion or association. *Poem 13* is a dance of images flashing up an open fireplace, fiery horses galloping in open spaces, a little furry creature's paws, a tail drawing monograms in the air, a kitten in the snow, and the darkening glow of cooling embers. *Poems 17* and *25*, with their disquieting images—with horses wading "up to their chests in spring" and with the jolly clang of ancient battles bursting on the sad contemporary scene—could be brought together under the title "March Is the Cruelest Month." *Poem 25,* especially, is masterly, showing once more the poet's control of her medium: presenting her scene of vernal fermentation under the constellation of the Virgin, she builds up the mood to a boisterous bolt of a steed—"bridles can't restrain torn lips"—only to end up with the resigned couplet, "And then, having succeeded in nothing, we'll only wave a hand, / but that hand's no longer a hand, and Virgo gives a laugh." Finally, *Poem 38,* which is an epiphany of Russia, shows us a poetic persona wrestling with a blizzard; watching what will come out alive, when the drunken torpor is over, from the unpeopled vastness of the land; and concluding that Russian angels "like sparrows in a cold snap / become frozen towards dawn / and fall to the snow from the wires." But the best lines, perhaps in the whole volume, are the opening ones of this poem, which I would suggest translating as "The blizzard, heated to a white glow, / has branded us with the image of Russia."

PAUL DEBRECZENY

THE HAW LANTERN. By Seamus Heaney. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $12.95.

In "Ars Poetica?" an essay in his 1978 collection *Bells in Winter,* Czeslaw Milosz warns that "poems should be written rarely and reluctantly, / under unbearable duress and only with the hope / that good spirits, not evil ones, choose us for their instrument."

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Seamus Heaney would seem not to obey these dicta: clearly the fabric of his daily life is woven with poetry, and his work shows scarcely a sign of "unbearable duress." And no one could doubt that he writes only at the behest of good spirits, that he is large-hearted and generous. And yet, some of the most important poems in his new book, *The Haw Lantern,* confront a reluctance to use language out of the fear of misusing it. One senses the poet's mistrust of his own formidable gifts even as he displays them with a quiet, self-assured virtuosity. The present book, Heaney's seventh full-length collection, is the work of a mature and assured poet.

Webster's 20th Century Unabridged Dictionary defines *haw* as "a berry or seed of the hawthorn." It is also (from the Anglo-Saxon *haga*) "a hedge," as well as "a small piece of land adjoining a house; a yard; an enclosed piece of land"—though these definitions are "obsolete." Heaney's lantern casts its light into the enclosed places where we live or where we might learn to live, into the not-quite-hermetic spaces of our private lives, and into the language itself. In the title poem—only fifteen lines—Heaney states:

> The wintry haw is burning out of season,
> crab of the thorn, a small light for a small
> people,
> wanting no more from them but that they keep
> the wick of self-respect from dying out,
> not having to blind them with illumination.

At the outset of his career, Heaney established digging as a metaphor for writing, for exploring the personal and cultural past. This phase culminated in the famous exhumations of *North* (1975), where the poet-as-archaeologist reconstructs the buried life of "The Bog Queen" and, in "Bone Dreams," invites the reader to:

> Come back past
> philology and kennings,
> re-enter memory
> where the bone's lair
>
> is a love-nest
> in the grass.

In *Field Work* (1979), his writing becomes at once more open and more formal. While many of the poems still exhibit his previous

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preoccupation with the land, he is less necromantically obsessed with the archaeological past. In the ten "Glanmore Sonnets" that form the centerpiece of this book, Heaney expresses a deeply wrought physical love for the living (though in the final sonnet he cannot resist the image of lovers, "Darkly asperged and censed . . . laid out / Like breathing effigies on a raised ground") and a natural, almost Wordworthian landscape that the poet can inhabit with ease. And beyond this, the collection resurrects the mystery of "words entering almost the sense of touch"—a mystery explored at length in *Station Island* (1985). *The Haw Lantern* is at first glance an altogether more modest book—a slim volume indeed, of only thirty-one poems occupying fifty-one pages. And yet it quickly, quietly, opens new territory.

The collection's opening poem, "Alphabets," returns us to Heaney's overriding concern with the tangible sense of language, evoking the child's growing fascination with the ability to make signs for what is spoken, heard, imagined. It recounts the poet's progress, is a recapitulation of all the steps and phases that lead ultimately to grace and mastery, a celebration of the poet's delight in the feel of words and rhythms:

> Here in her snooded garment and bare feet,
> All ringleted in assonance and woodnotes,
> The poet's dream stole over him like sunlight
> And passed into the tenebrous thickets.

As the poem proceeds, the writer is no longer a mere pupil and farmboy but has himself become "the scribe / Who drove a team of quills on his white field." Which takes us back, by another path, to "Digging."

"Alphabets" covers ground familiar to those who have followed Heaney's work even casually. The most ambitious pieces—and the most astonishing departures—in *The Haw Lantern* are a handful of political poems that embody the cryptic assurance of Milosz. To put it another way, they are the sort of poems Milan Kundera might write were he a poet: difficult, edgy, uneasy, abstract, allegorical, and yet infused with a knowing and sympathetic humor; located everywhere and nowhere, in a country that is both central and marginal. With such titles as "From the Frontier of Writing," "Parable Island," "From the Republic of Conscience," "From the Land of the Unspoken," and "From the Canton of Expectation" serv-

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ing as signposts, Heaney the former hedge-school master is once again the "inner emigré" in all troubled and self-divided cities: Belfast, Berlin, Prague, Szczecin. In "From Parable Island":

> To find out where he stands the traveller
> has to keep listening—since there is no map
> which draws the line he knows he must have
> crossed.

The island is not the quaint resort visited by tourists who bring the trappings of their own lives with them; it is a wary—and weary—place where "fork-tongued natives keep repeating / prophecies they pretend not to believe" and "where (some day) / they are going to start to mine the ore of truth."

The poet's own wariness, his refusal to endorse or to placate those who would manipulate language to achieve power, becomes increasingly evident as one reads further in this collection. Heaney is clearly not only the poet of "romantic Ireland," as some of his critics within and without Ireland have accused him of being; he is, while not denying his Yeatsian inheritance, with Milosz and Kundera and Orwell, also a realist who knows that a corrupted language corrupts those who would use it. It is not so odd a stance in a country where people still remember that their original language contained no words denoting abstractions. In "From the Land of the Unspoken" he asserts that:

> Our unspoken assumptions have the force
> of revelation. How else could we know
> that whoever is the first of us to seek
> assent and votes in a rich democracy
> will be the last of us and have killed our
> language?

While in "From the Canton of Expectation" he charges that:

> They would banish the conditional for ever,
> this generation born impervious to
> the triumph in our cries of *de profundis*.
> Our faith in winning by enduring most
> they made anathema, intelligences
> brightened and unmannerly as crowbars.

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This is Heaney's equivalent of Yeats's tirades against "this most unmannerly town," the fulminations of *Responsibilities,* the famous injunction to "Scorn the sort now growing up / All out of shape from toe to top, / Their unremembering hearts and heads / Base-born products of base beds." Speaking for his compatriots on both sides of the border, Heaney acknowledges that they have not become "the indomitable Irishry" Yeats had wished for. But where Yeats is rant and rhetoric (the quarrel with others), Heaney is gentle irony and circumspection, knowing from the first that words can send the mob into the street, that language can condemn as well as pardon. He posits his own versions of the peasantry and the hard-riding aristocracy.

For Heaney, as for all the Irish, the glory of poetry resides not so much in the story itself as in the telling of it. And in *The Haw Lantern,* every line tells, is an adventure in the language to match the excitement of one's first reading of Geoffrey Hill's *King Log* or *Tenebrae,* or Yeats's *Responsibilities.* The poet who can declare that "Christ's sickle has been in the undergrowth. / The script grows bare and Merovingian" as easily as he can conjure "Nipple and hive, bite-lumps, / small acorns of the almost pleasurable," or identify with "soft-eyed calves of the dew, / Astonished and assumed into fluorescence" clearly has considerable technical resources at his command, and can employ them without straining for effect. Nor is he in danger of losing his voice, degenerating into self-parody, or lapsing into silence.

Yet, for all his flashes of virtuosic brilliance, Heaney's intent is not to dazzle us but to bring us back into the world, to return us to ourselves. As his compatriot Michael Longley has observed, "Because a poet is someone for whom no experience is complete until he has written about it, most poems are elegies." This can be taken as a central tenet for Heaney as well, and not only in the abstract. The heart of *The Haw Lantern* is not dominated by political allegories; rather, it is a series of eight sonnets, "Clearances," in memory of his mother that reveal Heaney most vulnerable and at home. And as pendants to these we have "In Memoriam: Robert Fitzgerald" and "The Summer of Lost Rachel" which, as well as "The Stone Verdict," "The Old Team," "The Milk Factory," and "A Postcard from Iceland," reaffirm his fundamental affinity with the plainspoken pastoral of Edward Thomas, in whose poems also words enter the sense of touch. *The Haw Lantern* is not necessarily the book

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we would have expected, ten years ago, from Heaney, but it is what might have been hoped for.

JOHN DREXEL

SELECTED POEMS, 1957–1987. By W. D. Snodgrass. Soho Press. $19.95.

W. D. Snodgrass won the Pulitzer Prize for *Heart's Needle* in 1960. Perhaps, in the memorable language of Richard Nixon, he peaked too soon. When he brought out his second collection, *After Experience* (1968), although it was a better book, it was overlooked. *The Führer Bunker* of 1977 was denounced by desperate misreading. Recently it has become commonplace, in summary accounts of contemporary verse, to blame Snodgrass for the abuses of confessional poetry. Thus are the sins of the third generation visited upon the progenitors. One must admit that *Heart's Needle,* with its miseries of divorce and child-loss, started things: Robert Lowell sometimes credited his Iowa pupil Snodgrass with showing him the way to *Life Studies.*

Perhaps Snodgrass's *Selected Poems 1957–1987,* beautifully produced by Soho Press, will find this paleoconservative new readers among the young, as new poets look to rhyme and meter again. Snodgrass is a master of poetic forms. His meters are flabbergasting and multiple, counting whatever can be counted. Within these meters, and without them when he tries a poem free of number, his rhythms are resolute and expressive. He begins with the noise of the fifties, "Stone lips to the unspoken cave," but continues to explore the thousand things available to formal genius, like this stanza that ends "Lobsters in the Window":

> I should wave back, I guess.
> But still in his permanent clench
> He's fallen back with the mass
> Heaped in their common trench
> Who stir, but do not look out
> Through the rainstreaming glass,
> Hear what the newsboys shout,
> Or see the raincoats pass.

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This poem, from *After Experience,* I would submit to any skeptical eye; the title poem is another.

Snodgrass is one of nature's rhymers. No one in this century has used rhyme so structurally or so semantically or with more serious wit. From the beginning he uses rhyme on the off-stress, demanding distortion for meter's necessity: "The hills, the little houses, the costumes" rhymes with "A tourist whispering through the priceless rooms." He rhymes vowels, consonants, dissyllables; he rhymes impossible words with his ear's exactness. Does rhyme lead him to song or song to rhyme? Elizabethan song is audible in early poems, Provençal in later; one remembers that Snodgrass has spent years making rhymed translations according to original impossible schemes.

At the start, the song recounts personal loss and betrayal. Loss and betrayal continue but turn general as Snodgrass perceives human error (selfishness, treachery, narcissism, murder, lies) first in himself and then in everybody. Appropriately the personal situates itself in the historical; behind *Heart's Needle* is Korea, behind *The Führer Bunker* Vietnam. His vision of humanity, bleaker than Calvin's, accounts for some nervous rejections of his work. It is hard to take.

Hardest is *The Führer Bunker,* in which Hitler himself, Eva Braun, Goebbels, Goering, Himmler, and the rest of the cast speak poetic monologues during the last days of the Reich. This poetry of outrage continually reaches past shock to obscenity, making a catalogue of sin like Dante's Hell without a Purgatory, much less a *Paradiso.* The fundamental vision, constantly misread, damns not merely *them,* Germans or Nazis *out there,* but the viciousness we share with them. In no way does Snodgrass let these people off his hook; readers find it offensive when they feel the same hook caught in their own jaw.

His protagonists defend themselves, of course, consciously by evasion and rationalizing, unconsciously by splitting attention: Indentations in some monologues present minds wandering distractedly among topics and obsessions, most powerfully Eva Braun's monologue when she keeps hearing "Tea for Two." Then there is Hitler's monologue which zigs and zags among a description of coprophagy to immediate memory to plans for suicide and to sentimental memory of "The cake my mother made me . . . . "

What relieves this poetry is form. Against expressiveness of evil

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Snodgrass constructs tight grids of shape; often the grid itself turns expressive—reflexive, ironic—as when Himmler fits his self-justificatory blather onto graph paper. Magda Goebbels poisons her children in ninety-six lines of rhymed stanzas mimicking children's verse. The conflict that form engenders is itself obscene, obscenity doubling obscenity with fierce energy to make a murderous cradle song:

> This is the needle that we give
> Soldiers and children when they live
> Near the front in primitive
> Conditions or real dangers;
> This is the spoon we use to feed
> Men trapped in trouble or in need,
> When weakness or bad luck might lead
> Them to the hands of strangers.
>
> This is the room where you can sleep
> Your sleep out, curled up under deep
> Layers of covering that will keep
> You safe till all harm's past.
> This is the bed where you can rest
> In perfect silence, undistressed
> By noise or nightmares, as my breast
> Once held you soft but fast.

Long overdue, the *Selected Poems* (maybe overselected; I will not quibble) gathers work out of print, poems printed in small editions, poems never before collected. The final section comes as a relief, more grid and song than pain—though injustice and suffering remain the song's burden. Finally, Snodgrass's poems exemplify and affirm endurance despite the horror of things. In some later poems the poet praises birds that keep on singing and trees that live on, seasoned wood and the people who season it.

DONALD HALL

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ARCHAIC FIGURE. By Amy Clampitt. Alfred A. Knopf. $15.95.
THE END OF BEAUTY. By Jorie Graham. Ecco Press. $16.50.
THE TRADITION. By A. F. Moritz. Princeton University Press. $21.50.

"Come Muse migrate from Greece and Ionia," urged Whitman in the second section of "Song of the Exposition" (1871):

> Cross out please those immensely overpaid accounts,
> That matter of Troy and Achilles' wrath, and Æneas',
> Odysseus' wanderings,
> Placard "Removed" and "To Let" on the rocks of your snowy
> Parnassus,
> Repeat at Jerusalem, place the notice high on Jaffa's gate
> and on Mount Moriah,
> The same on the walls of your German, French and Spanish
> castles, and Italian collections,
> For know a better, fresher, busier sphere, a wide, untried
> domain awaits, demands you.

In her visitations to American poets during the hundred years or so since Whitman issued that wheedling invitation (a similar dismissal of the past, couched in more conciliatory terms, can be found in "Starting from Paumanok"), the Muse has largely heeded his advice and withdrawn most of her investments in classical, biblical, and neoclassical literary subjects. But even in the New World "those immensely overpaid accounts" have never been definitively closed—a glance at the ledgers reveals such recent entries as Louise Glück's *The Triumph of Achilles*—and the three new volumes under review show them to be quite active still.

Each of the three poets defines a quite different relation to "that matter of Troy," and what goes with it. Amy Clampitt is concerned with actual history and experience; her book is in part a survey of people, places, and works of art that survive to be assembled into a new tradition oriented around what Virginia Woolf, in Clampitt's epigraph, calls "the ancient consciousness of women, charged with suffering and sensibility, and for so many ages dumb." That tradition, as Clampitt sketches it, extends from various goddesses and female mythological figures, such as the Medusa and the Virgin Mary, to "no goddess / but a named mere girl" (the "archaic figure" of the title poem) who, standing "headless in East Berlin," reveals "the black core / of what we are, of everything we were to be / have since become"; it culminates in the analogously ruined women of

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modern thought and literature: Dorothy Wordsworth, Margaret Fuller, George Eliot, and Virginia Woolf, among others. For A. F. Moritz, by contrast, "the tradition" is not a collection of things that have survived but a ghostly emanation from the traces of things largely vanished: "Now and again some few among our proverbs / are shown by science to be not wholly meaningless," the speaker of the volume's title poem wryly observes. Jorie Graham, who is the most radical of the three in matters of poetics, is curiously the most conservative in matters of tradition; she alone still "believes" in the mythology—in the sense that she finds in the lore of classical and biblical antiquity as well as in medieval legend and spirituality meaningful figures of thought, a living figurative language of undiminished eloquence, truthfulness, and authority.

Graham's book is also by far the most difficult, intellectually demanding, and technically innovative—compared both to the other volumes reviewed here and to the work she has produced to date. Her new poems are not only about personal relations but about relation itself and about meaning as a function of relation—of the relation between people, between artist and medium, between poet and public, between present and past. In the third section of "Noli Me Tangere" Graham writes:

> I have seen how the smoke here
> inhabits a space
> in the body of air it must therefore displace,
>
> and the tree-shaped gap the tree inhabits,
> and the tree-shaped gap the tree
> invents. Siren,
> reader,
> it is here, only here,
> in this gap
>
> between us,
> that the body of who we are
> to have been
> emerges:

True to such an understanding of the possibilities of meaning, Graham has produced a series of meditations and portraits that express particular situations or scenes as dynamic configurations whose informing structure derives from the subjects of mythology, scripture, hagiography, art, and legend.

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At the conclusion of "Pollock and Canvas," the longest poem in her book and a kind of *ars poetica,* Graham presents her brief against traditional representation in lines that are programmatic for the project she has undertaken:

> . . . . . The moment
> a figure appears on the canvas, she said,
> the story begins, the story begins the error sets in,
> the error the boredom, she said, the story talking louder
> than the paint, she said, the boredom the hurry, she said
> (without embarrassment, without shame)
> (and you must learn to feel shape as simply shape whispered the
> wind, not as description not as reminiscence not as what
>
> it will become)

Graham's commitment to "shape as simply shape" issues in a startling formal mannerism, the substitution of blank spaces and algebraic values for words, as if to ask, "Dear reader, is it enough for you that I am thinking of you / in this generic sort of way . . . ?" ("Room Tone"). One could hardly imagine a more austere renunciation of "description," of a representational poetics, than what one finds in such passages as the following (from the opening of "The Veil"):

> In the Tabernacle the veil hangs which is (choose one):
> the dress dividing us from_____; the sky; the real,
> through which the x ascends (His feet still showing through on
> this side)
>
> into the realm of uncreated things. . . .

For all its brilliance, however, the poetry generated by Graham's aesthetic commitments is often argumentative and abstract without being either intellectually lucid or sensually engaging; her reports on human experience come to us at times as if prejudiced by obscure metaphysical preoccupations. Still, her best poems carry the reader along by their sheer momentum, daring, passion, and assurance, making it possible for us to take pleasure in them far in advance of our comprehension.

Amy Clampitt has been on a trip. She's been to Greece, England, Italy, and Germany—and, more specifically, she's been to

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Thermopylae and Olympia, the Lake District and London (including Chelsea and Covent Garden), Venice and Munich, getting to this last city by train from Saloniki. Her new book is densely packed with the places she's visited, the paintings and buildings she's seen, all of it colored by a dual determination to be not too indiscriminately delighted, but not too priggish or ungenerous, either. Thus "Babel Aboard the Hellas International Express": "Disconsolate / brown man whose wife is sick climbs back / onto top berth to sleep—the one last solace. // His untouched yogurt has begun to spill. A mess. / The washrooms are by now a costive-making, / hopeless *cauchemar*. . . . / Stout ruddy woman; lean, fair-haired, ruddy man; / two small dark nondescripts; one human barrel, / chalk-stripe-tailored, curly-brilliantined, / Lech Walesa-mustachioed, jovial: with these // till Munich, we're to share what space there is. / They speak some common dialect, we're not / sure which. A bag of prunes is passed. / We offer olives. The conversation grows / expansive: we listen in one every syllable, // uncomprehending, entranced."

We might have wished for a traveller who was either more comprehending or less entranced: compare, for example, Clampitt's "Leaving Yánnina" with Merrill's "Yánnina," and think of the latter's Samos or Santorini, Auden's Ischia, Bishop's Brazil. The Mediterranean evokes from Clampitt, alas, only the usual associations—suffering, Christianity, poverty, passion (*cuore, amore, dolore*)—and many of the usual responses (touristic disappointment, grudging cultural devotion). Clampitt is aware of the ironic burden that devolves upon a poet who yet again takes up venerable themes on grand subjects, and her book contains deft reminiscences of Keats's "Ode" ("Tempe in the Rain") and Simonides's epigram ("Thermopylae"). In places she captures well the grandeur and clutter of the classical sites as one currently finds them, the "sardine-tin litter dripped on / by mythic fig and laurel" ("Tempe in the Rain"). But more often things Greek incite her to a willfully poetic keying-up of style, a literary mood capable of issuing, on occasion, in such lines as "the towering / quagmires of infinity / shrunk to a hairshirt" ("Atlas Immobilized").

Although traces of vulgarity persist in some of the English settings ("Spring, when it arrived again, would bring / birch foliage filmy as the bridal veil / she'd never wear"—with reference to Dorothy Wordsworth at "Grasmere"), Clampitt's feeling for her subjects is more assured, and her treatments of "attachment's uncut

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knot—so rich, so dark, / so dense a node the ache still bleeds, / still binds, but cannot speak" are, in consequence, quite moving. Best of all are the poems set in America. Here it may be useful to contrast the opening of "Venice Revisited" with "A Hermit Thrush," the masterpiece of the new volume and, to my mind, one of Clampitt's most successful productions. The Venice poem begins as follows:

> Guise and disguise, the mirrorings and masquerades,
> brocaded wallowings, ascensions, levitations:
> glimmering interiors, beaked motley; the hide-
> and-seek of Tintoretto and Carpaccio. From within
> walled gardens' green enclave, a blackbird's warble—
> gypsy non sequitur out of root-cumbered
> terra firma, a mainland stepped from
> to this shored-up barge, this Bucintoro
> of mirage, of artifice. Outside the noon-dim
> dining room, the all-these-years-uninterrupted
> sloshing of canals; bagged refuse, ungathered
> filth; the unfed cats, still waiting.

The problem with this performance, with this heap of adjectives, learned allusions, and wildly oscillating tones, is that it fails to be evocative and simply overwhelms us with a verbal opulence designed to mimic the opulence of its subject. By contrast, "A Hermit Thrush," which is also about a return to a place visited only at intervals, assumes a calmer and more deliberate voice; it also makes a much cleverer use of its setting, with Clampitt claiming explicitly, on the one hand, that "there's nothing here / to seize on as exemplifying any so-called virtue" and yet finding, on the other hand, a series of natural analogues in the "thread of cinquefoil, tendril of the magenta / beach pea, trammel of bramble" for the "certainty" (initially denied) that "all attachment may prove at best, perhaps, / a broken, much-mended thing." This passionate meditation—wise, uncomplicated, deeply felt but almost superstitiously restrained—evinces all the lyric power and beauty for which Clampitt's earlier work has been so justly celebrated.

Moritz's poetry is much taken up with our relations with the dead. The question posed with some emotional urgency at the climax of the title poem—"And the real fathers?"—recurs in various guises throughout the collection. "We were gods, once, father, twenty years ago," the speaker of "Gods Though Doomed to Die" wistfully exclaims, while a different mood animates the speaker of "The List," who says, "It occurred to me that we should write down the

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names of the dead" and concludes, "I've done it. I've finally killed them. I've killed the dead." But, as Moritz and every other student of anthropology knows, the dead never stay dead for long, and there is seldom such a thing as a definitive parting; thus, "Alive in the Dawn" ends with a self-cancelling question: "And can we now, finally, cut ourselves from the ones / who won't be seen again, in any possible day / coming to us on earth?—O mother, father, / in the pre-dawn, rusted anchors in your wet graves." Given these Oedipal preoccupations, it is not altogether surprising to find, among the series of persona poems which comprise *The Tradition,* three or four sequences that center on patriarchs from classical and biblical antiquity, Chinese and medieval legend.

Moritz likes to make those legendary figures speak in a contemporary voice that yet retains a dignity commensurate with their antique grandeur. Thus, in "Jonah Tries to Remember," the prophet displays an almost medical sensibility, discoursing in measured cadences on the leviathan's gastric juices and enzymes. Elsewhere Moritz manages to achieve an epic simplicity and pathos, enhanced rather than undercut by authorial irony, as in the following passages from "The Land of Colchis":

> Long before Jason I set out for Colchis.
> My companions were bolder, more skilled than his
> in war and every art.
> And we were more beautiful, more deeply dyed in youth,
> more perfectly naked and at home
> in the sun's eye, the cycle of pleasure and sleep.
> . . . .
>
> Games on the deck kept us fit for any danger.
> Stories remembered by the lyre
> brought us monsters, death, and the goal hidden by God
> even in the hollow blue.
>
> Then, on the islands we touched, they said Jason had won
> Colchis.
> Somehow he had passed us unseen, sailing straight on
> while we curved, wondering, on the flat sea. . . .
>
> Colchis raped and withered.
> Our prize stolen long ago.
> But lost to fame we still go on,
> never older, tired to death of youth. . . .

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Here, then, are some casualties of "the tradition," some heroes who never made it, who fell outside the canon and who, preserved in their native splendor, are now objects of aesthetic delight without possible use or application, kept in training eternally for a task they are too late to perform. Best of Moritz's alternative mythologies is "Petra," of which I reproduce here the first and last sections:

> The city, recently abandoned when we arrived,
> was as disappointing as usual with legendary sites.
> Nothing of labyrinth in the grid of the few streets.
> Nothing of garden in the dusty acacias along gravel paths.
> True, it was a city of rose-colored stone.
> But only as others are cities of tarpaper or corrugated tin.
> . . . .
>
> True, the city was half as old as time: much had gone on.
> Experts might keep themselves busy there for years.
> But we already knew all about the ones who lived there.
> How their pleasures ceased to move them,
> yet they found themselves unable to change at all,
> afraid to give up or alter a single gesture.
> Then one day they set out, taking everything with them,
> to see if there were other people with another love;
> or at least a new color of skin, a strange caress.

Moritz does not evenly sustain this tone of melancholy historicism, deceptively bland and slyly subversive, but when he does succeed in evoking the invisible cities of the past, he persuades us that, despite Whitman, there may still be something owing to those immensely overpaid accounts held in perpetuity by the dead.

DAVID M. HALPERIN

POEMS OF LOVE AND WAR. FROM THE EIGHT ANTHOLOGIES AND THE TEN LONG POEMS OF CLASSICAL TAMIL. Selected and Translated by A. K. Ramanujan. Columbia University Press. $34.00.

In recent months the Tamils, or at least a projection of them, have infiltrated the news in the self-styled "developed" countries. So that, from the parochial vantage common to those countries, the Tamils have suddenly begun to exist. One might gather

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from current summaries of their life before they came to be thus known that the Tamils are a Dravidian people from southern India. In relatively recent times (the dates, as is often the case when they embrace something so amorphous as a lengthy process of migration, tend to be vague) some of the Tamils removed and resettled in what is now Sri Lanka. They are therefore, from the point of view of the earlier inhabitants of the island, relative newcomers, in that respect occupying a position comparable to, say, that of the European "Americans" in relation to the indigenous peoples of the American continents, or to that of the English in relation to the Celtic peoples of Wales, Ireland, and Scotland. But from there on the analogy begins to fall apart. For the Europeans in the Americas, the English in Britain, managed to equip themselves not only with advanced lethal technology (and in the case of the former with exotic diseases and rapidly growing numbers), but they had identified themselves with forms of purposeful organization and effective action which they construed as proofs of their own superiority and even of divine sanction. Where they went they were the state.

The first thing that one is likely to have learned about the Tamils, if they entered one's ken through the headlines, is that they are terrorists, given to outrageous and violent disturbance of an established and preexisting state. Whereas the Tamils are not a state at all. They are merely a people.

The distinction and many of its corollaries are laid out in some detail by Bernard Nietschmann in an article that appeared in *Cultural Survival Quarterly,* which focuses attention on the situations of indigenous peoples in the present world and repeatedly portrays sufferings and devastations that the national papers tend, for reasons of their own, to ignore. "A state," Mr. Nietschmann writes, "is a centralized political system, recognized by other states, that uses civilian and military bureaucracy to enforce one set of institutions, laws, and sometimes language and religion within its claimed boundaries." And so on. The people of the state of Sri Lanka are, with respect to religion, predominantly southern, Theravada Buddhist. The traditional religion of the Tamil people is their own form of Hinduism.

In the current world peoples such as the Tamils, Mr. Nietschmann reminds us (for we do know it), "may be surrounded, divided, or dismembered by one or more international states." The Tamils of Sri Lanka are demanding autonomy and independence, and like other peoples driven to make such demands they are "referred to as 'rebels,' 'separatists,' 'extremists,' 'dissidents,' 'insurgents,'

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'terrorists'. . . . " It is unlikely that many, hearing these familiar characterizations, will recall the United Nations' declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, published in Geneva in 1985, from which Mr. Nietschmann quotes: "Indigenous nations and peoples may engage in self-defense against State actions in conflict with their right to self-determination."

This is not a political resume of the current appalling Tamil-Sri Lanka conflict, and neither in his introduction to *Poems of Love and War* nor in his earlier volume of classical Tamil translations, *The Interior Landscape* (University of Indiana Press), does A. K. Ramanujan refer to the situation of the Tamils and Tamil culture in contemporary Sri Lanka. On the other hand, most of the media accounts give little indication of the antiquity and coherence of Tamil culture, though the conflict in Sri Lanka has resulted in part from the fact that enough of the Tamil traditions, and with them the Tamil sense of identity, have survived to matter intensely to the present Tamil inhabitants of Sri Lanka.

Even so, much of the Tamil tradition, like so many others, has been lost, and one of the most precious and perhaps most portable parts of it, the classical poetry, nearly vanished without a trace. Mr. Ramanujan's introduction to *Poems of Love and War* provides a brief account of the salvaging of the venerable texts of the originals, which are part of a body of writing that is reputed to include some of the greatest of Indian poetry. The classical period, when the poems were composed, dates from about 100 B.C. to about 250 A.D.

The poems, which in their first life were part of an oral tradition, were eventually written down, and were preserved, commented on, and taught, for most of two thousand years. But they, and the Tamil tradition itself, did not meet with the approval of a purist Hinduism that marked Indian academic studies in the eighteenth century, and the Tamil classics, as well as Jain and Buddhist works, were banished.

Here and there, devoted and independent spirits kept such of the ancient writings as they had been able to obtain, and treasured and studied them, hoping for followers. A few rare successions of this kind are the basis for the survival of the tradition of classical Tamil poetry as it is now known. Mr. Ramanujan's digest of the way it came about is tantalizingly sparse.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century—so part of the story goes—a "liberal-minded" civil judge named Rãmacuvãmi Mutaliyãr was transferred to the small town of Kumpakõnam. There, in 1880,

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he met a young scholar named Cāminãta Aiyar, already distinguished for his Tamil erudition. The judge inquired into the scholar's learning and was unimpressed. Aiyar had not even heard of the great collections of the Tamil classical period, and Mutaliyār launched him forthwith on a study of those poems that would occupy the rest of Aiyar's life.

The dates of the story, as Mr. Ramanjuan tells it, are a little puzzling. Aiyar, in this account, was born in 1855, yet at the time of the "fateful meeting" with Mutaliyār in the autumn of 1880 he was forty-four. Whatever the explanation of this, I trust it does not detract from the happy sequel, in which Aiyar, and "his peers, such as Ci. Vay. Tāmōtaram Piḷḷai" roamed through villages following clues, searched in attics and monasteries, and rediscovered, edited, and printed the ancient texts.

Piḷḷai wrote, "Only what has escaped fire and water (and religious taboo) remains; even of that termites and the bug named Rāma's Arrow take a toll. . . . When you untie a knot, the leaf cracks. When you turn a leaf, it breaks in half. . . . Old manuscripts are crumbling and there is no one to make new copies."

Then there were the variations and errors among the manuscripts. Each community had studied its own texts, and the choices—and the alterations—were the result of the tastes and sects of individual scholars in the past. Each copy was unique. The work of men like Aiyar and Piḷḷai brought the poems from this precarious and scattered existence into print.

The pieces from the great classical anthologies fall into two major divisions: *akam*, meaning "interior" poems, or love poems, and *puram*, or "exterior" poems on the subjects of war, royalty, death, history. Mr. Ramanujan's book reflects these divisions in its first two sections. The love poems are further arranged corresponding to the landscapes that, according to a complex convention, represent the moods of the poems. The *puram* poems are arranged according to more obvious subject matter. There is also a section of comic and satiric poems, and a final "book" of longer passages from classical religious and narrative poetry. Mr. Ramanujan's "Afterword" is a detailed and helpful analysis of the assumptions, formulations, evolution, and context of Tamil classical poetry, and it is a valuable guide to the translations.

It is quite appropriate that his essay appears at the end of the book. For with a volume such as this a reader is likely to turn at once, with the slightest possible introductory knowledge, to the

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poems—or rather the translations—themselves. Looking, as always, for the original, of course. The whole venture depends not upon the authority or intelligence of the surrounding information but upon the qualities of the translations themselves. And inevitably what we find in Mr. Ramanujan's work is not the original but a representation projected from the assumptions and conventions of contemporary English poetry. His credentials as a Tamil scholar appear to be flawless, as far as a complete lay person can judge, and he has devoted himself to the study and translation of the classical poems for years. He is at the same time deeply versed in contemporary poetry and criticism in English.

The result is a collection of Tamil translations that, as his earlier volume *The Interior Landscape* did, affords a fresh, vivid, readable, and delightful glimpse of the poetry of a great tradition. The distances the poems have had to traverse, from one age and context, as well as from one language to another, are vast, and they multiply the problems of such translation. The tone of the originals must have contained many shades of formality that cannot even be suggested by the English of our time and mores. Mr. Ramanujan's essay indicates the nature of some of these formalities and their role in the poems. He has not attempted to reproduce in English the metrical forms of the originals—a wise choice, I think, for such forms are in fact a part not only of the original conventions but of the original language itself.

Since the Tamil poems, when they were composed, were not written at all but were part of a rich, complex oral tradition, Mr. Ramanujan has evolved a light, rapid verse, with short lines which suggest the pace of speech and voice. Sometimes the lightness is such that the lines have no substance individually and read as prose. And the English occasionally seems colloquial in ways inconsistent not only with the original conventions he has suggested but with his own style as a whole. Yet the translations are a pleasure to read and to listen to, as oral poems have to be. Translations such as this one make Mr. Ramanujan's work a gift to the Tamil tradition and to contemporary poetry in English:

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The Horse Did Not Come Back

The horse did not come back,
his horse did not come back.
All the other horses have come back.

The horse
of our good man,

who was father in our house
to a little son
with a tuft of hair
like a plume on a steed,

it did not come back.

Has it fallen now,
his horse
that bore him through battle,

has it fallen
like the great tree
standing at the meeting place
of two rivers?

—*Erumai Veliyaṉär*

W. S. MERWIN

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LETTERS

To the Editor:

Edith Kurzweil's review of Richard Plant's *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War Against Homosexuals* (*PR* 1, 1987) contains three errors in two paragraphs. The "official" war against gays began with the death of Ernst Roehm in the summer of 1934, not 1935. Plant did not speculate concerning Himmler's "own latent homosexuality." Indeed, Plant's book does much to dispel the myth that many Nazi leaders were homosexual (similar to the other myth that Hitler was Jewish). Incredibly, Ms. Kurzweil implies that homosexual activity may be a fate worse than death—"'Racially inferior' homosexuals . . . did not even get a trial, and were completely at the mercy of homosexual guards." Yet, SS guards could be executed if they engaged in homosexual behavior. If gay, SS men had to hide it. One wonders if Ms. Kurzweil even read Plant's book.

Hugh Murray
Jackson Heights, New York

Edith Kurzweil replies:

I suggest Hugh Murray reread Plant's book. Roehm was purged in 1934, and "new laws concerning homosexual conduct . . . were made public [on] June 28, 1935" (p. 69). As for the fate of homosexuals, it is a well-known fact that they were singled out for gross mistreatment even though some Nazis were themselves covert or overt homosexuals. Murray gives the impression that I disliked Plant's book; on the contrary. I suggest he also reread my review.

Edith Kurzweil
Rutgers University

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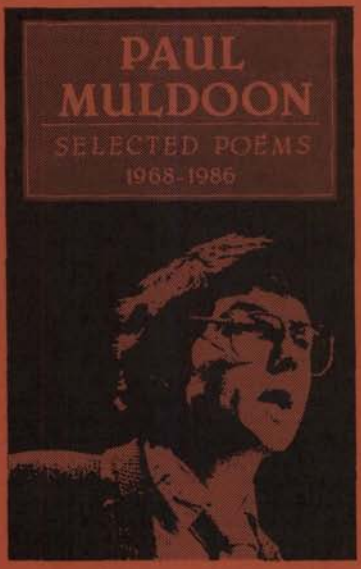

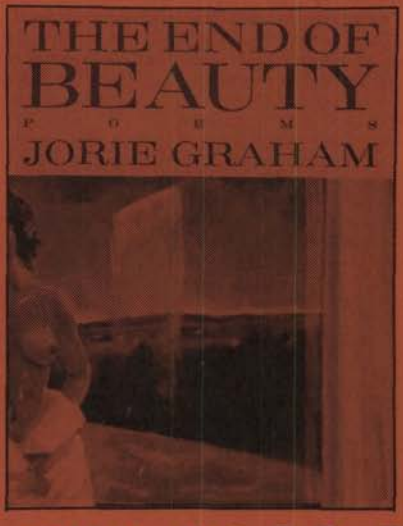

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